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TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES:
CONSTRUCTING MALE GENDER AFTER DIVORCE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * *

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1998

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1998
ABSTRACT

This dissertation picks up on the suggestions in the current research that divorce creates fundamental changes in the organization of families in terms of gender. Thus, I use feminist theory, with its elevation of gender to a central category of analysis, to begin to explain the mechanisms that shape fathers' responses to divorce.

This study draws on qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews with a randomly selected sample of twenty nonresidential fathers from Marion, Ohio. Each participant was interviewed twice -- an initial interview in 1994, with a second interview approximately three years later. All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using the NUDIST program for analysis of qualitative data.

This study found that divorce prompted a crisis in gender relations for men. Men occupied positions of relative privilege when married, and divorce called this status into question. The relational and legal changes prompted by divorce signified a loss of access and authority to which many of the participants felt entitled. Fathers' narratives in this regard centered on two interrelated themes: perceived loss of power and status within their families, and a concomitant loss of status within a gender-structured society.

Changes in the gender order in families influenced men's self-constructions. Embedded within these fathers' narrative accounts of their diminished status and power
following divorce were contradictory constructions of gender that simultaneously supported and challenged normative gender arrangements in families. Such paradoxical constructions clustered around two domains: concurrent support for, and critique of, traditional family ideology and paradoxical coexistence of felt powerlessness and actual power.

This study also examines the ways in which men recreated themselves as gendered individuals following divorce. The results suggest that, in their postdivorce re-ordering, some men attempted to establish a dominant masculinity in terms of power, authority, and control, while other fathers were provoked to resist norms of dominant masculinity and to defy conventional representations of divorced fathers as absent parents. Moreover, an examination of gender and social class as components of an interacting system, illustrates the constraints that class position imposed on men as they negotiated postdivorce gender relations.
Dedicated to my daughters, Samantha and Tessa
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people have contributed to my work over the last several years and I want to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation. I want to begin by thanking the fathers who participated in this study for being so giving of their time and for opening their lives to me.

This study would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my adviser and colleague, Professor Patrick C. McKenry. I thank him for being such a gifted and giving mentor and friend, and look forward to the collaborations ahead.

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I also would like to acknowledge the significant contribution that Professor Mary Margaret Fonow has made to my academic pursuits. As this project has unfolded, she has been a constant supporter.

In addition, it is important for me to recognize the substantial support that I have received from our Department Chair, Dr. Albert Davis. He has both encouraged and given me the freedom to pursue my academic passions. I am particularly grateful for the myriad opportunities he has given me to teach and explore feminist family scholarship.
Other members of the Ohio State community have also been instrumental in my academic development. Indeed, without such strong support from my peers, this journey would have been far lonelier and not nearly as personally enriching and full of fun. In particular, I want to acknowledge Susan Bowers, Diane Centolella, Kathy Clark, Julie Law, Diana Leigh, Mary McKelvey, Laura Meyer and Phyllis Miller.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Two patterns in American family life have combined to make noncustodial fatherhood increasingly common in contemporary American society: marital dissolution through separation and divorce and childbearing in the absence of marriage and paternal residence. Although both patterns, as well as the phenomenon as a whole, are worthy of serious study, the present analysis focuses solely on the former -- that is, nonresidential fathers after separation and divorce.

Divorce rates in the United States doubled between the late 1960s and the late 1970s. The rate has stabilized and even declined slightly since then, but it still remains at what are historically very high levels (National Center for Health Statistics, 1994). In particular, current estimates suggest that between 40 and 62 percent of first marriages end in divorce (Martin & Bumpass, 1989; National Center for Health Statistics, 1994; Norton & Miller, 1992), and that most divorces include children under the age of 18 years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). As a result, approximately 6.6 million children live with a single parent after divorce (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994), with about 90 percent of these children residing with their mothers (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1996).
As these statistics illustrate, divorce has become an increasingly prominent feature in the American family landscape. And yet, although divorce has become commonplace and sometimes even described as a normative life transition (Price & McKenry, 1988), there is relatively little information about fathers' experiences after divorce (Arditti, 1995; Kruk, 1994). This study seeks to bring more focused attention to bear on this understudied group.

Substantively, the goal of this dissertation is to explore noncustodial fathers' experiences with and perceptions of their divorce process; noncustodial fathers' coparental experiences; and influences on the continuation of noncustodial fathers' parental role since their divorces. In addition, my purpose is to position these perspectives and experiences within their broader social contexts. Theoretically, my aim is to synthesize conceptualizations of divorce, constructions of gender in families, and fatherhood. Because divorce prompts a disruption of the gender order in families (Arendell, 1995; Fox & Blanton, 1995; Riessman, 1990), it offers an appropriate, if not unique, opportunity to examine how men may be provoked to create new gender relations.

Father-Child Involvement Postdivorce

Here I want to sketch out the broad outlines of the inroads that have been made in exploring men's postdivorce lives. Research efforts have focused largely on divorced fathers' relationships with their children. Because sole physical custody by the mother with paternal visitation is still the most common custody arrangement (even in cases of joint legal custody), most divorced fathers experience the loss of physical custody of their
children. The nature of the relationship that divorced fathers maintain with their children in these circumstances has produced somewhat inconsistent findings.

Research has suggested that ongoing contact with children has a positive influence on the divorced father's well-being (D'Andrea, 1983; Dominic & Schlesinger, 1980; Keshet & Rosenthal, 1978; Stewart, Schwebel, & Fine, 1986). Fathers' postdivorce involvement also has often been found to be related to their children's well-being and positive developmental outcome (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1979; Kurdek, 1988; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). In addition, father involvement is highly related to maintenance of child support provisions (Seltzer, Schaeffer, & Charng, 1989; Teachman, 1991).

At the same time, the research clearly indicates a significant and progressive decline in divorced fathers' contact with their children over time, beginning in the first year after divorce (Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983; King, 1994; Seltzer, 1991; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). For example, several national studies have indicated that 25-50% of children have lost all contact with their noncustodial fathers within five years of the divorce (Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987; Mitchell, 1985). This loss of contact, in fact, is a chief complaint of divorced men (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1976; Jacobs, 1982; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

Thus, there seems to be an internal inconsistency in fathers' postdivorce responses. Fathers' continued involvement with their children following divorce is related to positive adjustment, for both fathers and children. Moreover, fathers often have expressed fear of
the potential attenuation of their relationships with their children. Yet many noncustodial fathers seem to maintain only infrequent postdivorce contacts with their children.

To begin to address this apparent inconsistency, an increasing research interest has focused on understanding "why" fathers disengage from their children, identifying those factors that determine the levels of father involvement following divorce (e.g., Dudley, 1991; Kruk, 1991; McKenry, Price, Fine, & Serovich, 1992; Wall, 1992). Although such research focus represents an improvement upon the scant research attention on fathers through the years, and begins to address the apparent inconsistency in fathers' postdivorce experiences, current research continues to exhibit various limitations.

For example, there still exists a dearth of research based on father report (Dudley, 1991; Kruk, 1994; Marsiglio, 1995a). There has been a tendency to sample former wives regarding fathers' contact with their children, and fathers' subjective interpretations and perceptions are conspicuously absent (Dudley, 1991; Wark, Bartle, & McKenry, 1994). Since there are significant indications that the former marital partners have different perceptions (Ahrons & Miller, 1993; Braver, Wolchik, Sandler, Fogas, & Zvetina, 1991). this absence of fathers' voices may influence research findings.

Another limitation of the existing research is that, to date, it has been largely atheoretical. To be sure, such approaches can provide, and have provided, important information. At the same time, atheoretical works can tend to fail to connect the salient concepts (Depner & Bray, 1993). A coherent theoretical base, as well as a contextualized knowledge, of fathers' postdivorce lives may help to facilitate a richer understanding (Braver, Wolchik, Sandler, & Sheets, 1993; Mandell, 1995). Thus, to begin to move
toward that goal, we need to identify and apply a theoretical underpinning that will better discern and explain the mechanisms that shape fathers' paradoxical responses to divorce.

A variety of suggestions in the existing literature point to the utility of feminist-informed gender theory as such an underlying interpretive framework. For example, Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991) argue that the longstanding gender-based division of labor within many families breaks down at the point of divorce. When couples stop living together, gender-structured exchanges between husbands and wives lapse, in turn leading to husbands' withdrawal of economic support for their former spouses as well as for their children. As Furstenberg and Cherlin's (1991) argument illustrates, divorce creates fundamental changes in the organization of family systems in terms of gender (Fox & Blanton, 1995). Perhaps as a result, men's postdivorce adjustment entails reformulations of their identities as men, as well as their views of themselves as husbands and fathers (Arendell, 1995; Arditti & Allen, 1993; Fox & Blanton, 1995; Mandell, 1995; Reissman, 1990).

Theoretical Foundations

This dissertation picks up on the suggestions in the current research and seeks to address the need for a stronger theoretical grounding by applying feminist perspectives. Although research informed by feminist theoretical perspectives most often focuses on women's experiences, feminist research need not be limited to the study of women (Reinharz, 1992). Indeed, feminist theory provides a useful interpretive framework within which to break through the silence surrounding men's subjective experiences (Arendell, 1995). Moreover, application of a feminist theoretical model allows for a focus on men as
explicitly gendered individuals. In particular, an exploration of the social construction of masculinities holds the potential to link our understanding of men's creation and maintenance of gendered selves -- as well as processes of resistance and change -- with our understanding of the ways in which gender influences power relations and perpetuates inequalities (Coltrane, 1994).

**Feminist Perspectives on Gender in Families**

Feminist theoretical perspectives suggest new approaches toward family scholarship that highlight the overarching significance of gender in family life. Specifically, a feminist view elevates the role of gender, viewing it as a process that underlies all behavior, that is shaped by and reproduces social structure (Ferree, 1990), and that, as such, can be viewed as a fundamental category of social relations both within and outside the family (Zinn, 1990). Thus, for feminists, gender is basic to our understanding of family functioning in the same way that most family science theorists consider generation to be a central organizing principle (Goldner, 1989).

Feminist conceptualizations, therefore, challenge the belief that family arrangements are biologically determined; rather, divisions by gender are viewed as socially and historically constructed (Ferree, 1990). In particular, a feminist gender model places gendered relationships in families within the context of a patriarchal social structure. The power hierarchies in the larger society influence gender relationships in families (Chafetz, 1988), and thus can be understood as incorporating a system of opportunity and oppression in which individual lives are constrained or channeled according to whether one is male or female (Allen & Baber, 1994). Gender power
hierarchies, furthermore, are best understood as systematically related to other structures of power, including race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation (Collins, 1990; Glenn, 1987; Zinn, 1990).

By elevating gender to a central category of analysis in this fashion, feminist perspectives can transform our understanding of family dynamics and provide a framework within which scholars can challenge the status quo. Feminists problematize gender and recast the family as a site of gender-stratification (Ferree, 1990; Thorne, 1992; Zinn, 1990). In this view, gender-structuring is not a neutral way of maintaining order in families and societies, but a process that benefits some at the expense of others.

**Theorizing Masculinities**

In order to develop an approach to the study of gender that taps the interconnections of personal practice and social structure, I draw upon concepts central to Connell's (1995) theorizing on the social organization of masculinity. Connell highlights three themes central to conceptualizing masculinity. First, like femininity, masculinity is an inherently relational concept. Gender is a system of power, and because it is based on subordination and power hierarchies, the study of masculinities thus is a study of relations of unequal power and how these relations are implemented. Masculinity and femininity, in other words, have meaning in relation to one another as social demarcations and cultural oppositions. Likewise, masculinity is characterized by relations between dominant and marginalized modes of masculinity. These multiple masculinities develop through the interaction of gender with other social structures such as race, class, and sexual orientation.
Second, masculinity is an internally complex structure, with a contradictory and dynamic character. In particular, the active process of creating and recreating masculinity is ongoing. Masculinity is not static, therefore, but is a form of ongoing interaction with the structures of the surrounding world (Kaufman, 1994).

Third, conceptualizing masculinity as an ongoing, interactive process focuses theoretical attention on transformation and change. For example, families are fields of relationships within which gender is negotiated over time. Changes in the gender order in families are inevitable, according to Connell (1995) because gender arrangements, in general, are predisposed to crisis and change. Such crisis tendencies can threaten the institutional foundation of men's family power (Connell, 1987). These changes in the gender order in families, thus, will always influence the construction of masculinities, as men respond to changing relations of gender power.

Theoretical Summary and Research Questions

These theoretical perspectives are particularly well positioned to further the purposes of my inquiry into the experiences of noncustodial fathers after divorce. The limited research to date has failed to acknowledge the central role of gender. Rather, as noted, it often attempts to speak to the father's role through the mother's eyes, failing to recognize the unique gendered experiences of men. By attending consciously to gender (Cook & Fonow, 1990, Ferree, 1990; Thompson, 1992), a feminist theoretical perspective provides a useful interpretive framework within which to explore the transitions that divorce may prompt in fathers' positions within their families, as well as within the broader, gender-structured society.
Furthermore, divorce is a context with the potential to illuminate the construction of masculinity in families. Divorce creates a disruption of gender arrangements in families, and thus offers an appropriate opportunity to explore men's changing gender identities and ideologies. For example, in their postdivorce reordering, men may attempt to establish a dominant masculinity in terms of power, authority, and control, or, conversely, defy conventional norms of dominant masculinity (Connell, 1995). In addition, as they re-assert their identities as men, fathers may reject conventional notions of the good provider role (Bernard, 1981). Because the creation and recreation of masculinities is always situated within concrete social circumstances, divorce offers a setting to examine the limits of what can be attempted when outcomes are not easily controlled.

Thus, in my view, an analysis of divorced fathers has implications for understanding the dynamics of families' changing gender relations over time. Drawing from the theoretical base described above, I propose to examine ten research questions designed to address the theoretical interconnections between divorce, the social construction of gender, and fatherhood:

1. To what extent does divorce prompt a transformation in gender relations of power in families -- i.e., making them more equitable or increasingly inequitable? And how do men perceive these transformations?

2. In their postdivorce reordering, how do men (re)construct the meaning of gender in everyday interaction?
3. In what ways are postdivorce men induced to (a) maintain and reproduce conventional gender relations; and/or (b) resist conventional gender arrangements and change patterns of thought and behavior?

4. How does divorce challenge men's sense of familial access and authority?

5. How do men's relationships with their children following divorce shape their notions of gender?

6. Does divorce create conditions in which men are likely to experience a sense of powerlessness?

7. In the divorced family, is there heightened potential for men to experience a contradictory coexistence of felt powerlessness and actual (if latent) power?

8. In what ways does the legal context surrounding divorce threaten men's sense of masculinity?

9. How does class interact with gender to shape men's negotiation of postdivorce relationships?

10. Do divorced fathers re-think the social organization of marriage by tapping into the raised consciousness of divorce?

The following chapters take up the task of answering and exploring these research questions. To begin this analysis, chapter two reviews the existing divorce research. This review indicates that extant research has rarely integrated in an express way conceptual perspectives that highlight the theoretical interconnections between divorce, gender, and constructions of fatherhood. The extant research has, however, explored questions that
point to the utility of examining these interconnections. Next, chapter three describes the research methodology used to conduct this study. After the research methods are outlined, the analysis of the data begins in chapter four with a purely descriptive focus. Chapter four also lays out the major themes that emerged from this study's narrative data. Then, in chapters five and six, I build on this thematic scheme to elucidate generalizable patterns and to discuss those patterns' theoretical significance. Specifically, chapter five explores the crisis in gender relations prompted by divorce, and chapter six examines the diversity of men's responses to gender change, as well as the ways in which they reconstruct gender in response to these changing relations of power. Finally, chapter seven discusses the implications of this study for future research and theory development, for feminist research methodologies, and for practice and policy.
A central focus of this study is the core interrelatedness of divorce, fatherhood, and gender. It has long been widely accepted that motherhood, to a large extent, defines women's femininity. The converse, while surprisingly understudied, should likewise prove true -- a study of fatherhood can illuminate the construction of masculinity in men's lives. Moreover, conducting such a study in the context of divorce is particularly appropriate, because divorce prompts a crisis in gender relations, in which patterns that are embedded within the marriage become evident and subject to reevaluation.

The literature review in this chapter provides a background for this study's explorations of divorce, fatherhood, and gender, as well as the relationships among them, by first focusing on historical perspectives on fatherhood. I turn next to divorce, reviewing the extant literature on nonresidential fathering after divorce. Finally, I assess the weaknesses and gaps in the literature, noting in particular the paucity of work exploring men's explicitly gendered experiences in and after divorce. This review allows me to begin to discuss theoretical treatments of postdivorce fathering, laying the foundation for this study's effort to consciously apply a firm theoretical foundation --
namely, feminist-informed gender theory — to the study of fathers' postdivorce experiences.

**Historical Perspectives on Fatherhood**

The last two decades have witnessed an explosion of interest in fathers and fatherhood. In spite of this contemporary interest in, and widespread support for, an enlarged father role, the pace of change in fathers' roles and responsibilities has been slow (LaRossa, 1988; Pleck, 1987). For example, although fathers are doing more child care and housework than they used to, most men do not assume equal responsibility for this work (Coltrane, 1996; Gerson, 1993). Furthermore, LaRossa (1988) cautions that expectations about modern fathers' nurturant involvements say more about cultural ideology than about shifts in the actual conduct of fatherhood. Underlying these ambiguities is what Pleck (1987) has called a "deep-seated ambivalence about what the role of the father really should be" (p. 84). This modern ambivalence can be located within a complex historical tradition of shifts in ideologies surrounding American men's parenting.

Historically, American imagery surrounding fatherhood has been rooted in more general assumptions about men and has found its foundation in dominant ideologies of gender (Cohen, 1993). For instance, beginning in the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries, fathers were viewed as the ultimate source of moral teaching for their children. This emphasis was rooted, to a large extent, in the period's conception of the differences between the sexes. Men were thought to have superior reasoning ability, and thus were
considered better-suited for the strong supervision children were assumed to need (Pleck, 1987).

New conceptions of fatherhood began to appear later in the Nineteenth Century. At this time, the structural changes accompanying the Industrial Revolution prompted a shift in paternal work patterns, and for the first time, fathers' central work activities were sited away from the family. This shift resulted in a new conception of fatherhood focused on fathers' primary function as breadwinner (Pleck, 1987). This shift also paralleled a new ideology about gender that emphasized a greater role for the mother in children's lives, and a more distant, indirect role for the father. Moreover, women were assumed to be naturally unselfish and nurturant, and vitally important in the daily lives of children. As mothers' influence gained prominence, however, fathers' authority within the family was reduced (Pleck, 1987). Concerns about this declining paternal authority have exerted a powerful influence. Indeed, such concerns have led to a new perception of fathers' direct importance in child rearing, beginning in the mid-1900s, and continuing to underlie contemporary discourse on the institution of fatherhood.

Largely as a reaction to the rise of maternal influence, as well as the changes that World War II brought for women's roles, the period between 1940 and 1965 can be characterized as ushering in a new perception of fathers' direct importance in child rearing as a sex-role model (Pleck, 1987). New theories about gender identified an extremely significant role for the father, particularly with regard to their sons' and daughters' development of sex-role identity (Biller, 1971). This new interpretation gave fathers a
direct but limited role with their children, and drew a clear distinction between paternal 
and maternal roles (Pleck, 1987).

The sex-role model interpretation of fathering was the first positive image of 
involved fatherhood since the moral overseer model of the colonial period. This new 
attention to the importance of the father's direct role in children's lives represented a 
strong counterforce to the culturally dominant distant breadwinner model. In spite of this 
new influence, however, the sex-role model never fully replaced the distant father 
breadwinner model as a dominant cultural ideology (Pleck, 1987; Thompson & Walker, 
1989).

The last decade has witnessed a fourth change in this series of adjustments in the 
conceptualization of fathers' roles and responsibilities. Criticism of the distant father 
breadwinner model has intensified, and an extension of the sex-role conceptualization of 
fatherhood, has centered around the perceived role of the "new father." This new father 
image can be traced to several social trends that have emerged in the latter part of the 
Twentieth Century. The most important of these trends has been women's increasing 
employment (Coltrane, 1995). In response to women's increased labor force participation 
in the 1970s, this new father ideal began to emerge, in which American men would begin 
assuming more of the parenting and domestic duties. This new father ideal has been 
accompanied by an emerging gender ideology in which women's and men's separate 
spheres are eroded, contributing to a fundamental reordering of gender relations of power 
in families (Coltrane, 1995).
Reviewing this historical perspective underscores the socially constructed nature of fatherhood images (Marsiglio, 1995a). Indeed, these shifting cultural ideologies serve to illustrate the ways in which父亲ing is influenced by contextual forces and can change in response to cultural, economic, institutional, and interpersonal influences (Doherty et al., 1996). This social landscape serves as a backdrop to the social science research on fathering because researchers are inevitably influenced by the social and cultural context within which they work (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinment, 1993).

For example, the sex-role model of fatherhood -- prominent in the 1950s and 1960s -- has had a significant impact on scholarly interest. In particular, this period's renewed interest in fathers' direct role in child development manifested itself in psychological research examining the effects of paternal absence (Phares, 1996). The basis of this research agenda was that, by comparing the behavior and personalities of children raised with and without fathers, one could essentially deduce the sort of influence that fathers typically had (Lamb, 1986). As early as the mid-1970s, scholars began to argue that the conventional father absence paradigm had outlived its usefulness (Pederson, 1976). Nevertheless, this model continues to dominate much of the modern research investigating fathers' influences on their children (Phares, 1996).

While this sex-role paradigm continues to impact contemporary scholarship on men and fathers, a central limitation of this approach is its definition of father absence. Most studies grounded in this model consider fathers absent if they do not live with their children. However, father's involvement with their children exists on a continuum regardless of their living arrangement (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). To use an artificial
dichotomy of absence versus presence based on residential status therefore neglects the vast diversity of fathers' involvement in their children's lives (Phares, 1996). Moreover, this sort of dichotomous thinking underlies the deficit perspectives that limit our ability to measure and conceptualize fathers' varied experiences and involvements (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997).

Post-1970s scholarly interest in fathering, in contrast, has been fueled by interrelated changes in the demographic profile of American families (Griswold, 1993) and a re-appraisal of family roles for women (Coltrane, 1995). These trends have facilitated a research agenda that addresses fatherhood topics more extensively, attempting to measure and conceptualize father involvement in new ways. For instance, Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985) proposed a tripartite typology that identifies and defines the different processes that father involvement in child rearing entail. These authors introduce the dimensions of (a) engagement (direct caregiving, leisure, or play); (b) accessibility (parental availability); and (c) responsibility (knowing what the child needs and making decisions about how to respond). Lamb and colleagues (1985) likewise developed a multivariate model of the determinants of father involvement -- motivation, skills, social support, and institutional practices -- and theorized that optimal father involvement was facilitated when each of these four determinants was present.

The conceptual approach to father involvement introduced by Lamb et al. (1985) has become the standard of contemporary parenting literature. This is illustrated by Pleck's (1997) recent review of the empirical literature on father involvement in heterosexual two-parent families. This summary of studies during the 1980s and 1990s
indicates that fathers' proportional engagement (relative to mothers) is currently somewhat over 40%, and their accessibility is nearly two-thirds. These figures are higher than those found in studies during the 1970s and early 1980s -- by approximately one-third for engagement and one-half for accessibility. Fathers' average share of responsibility, however, is not only substantially lower than mothers', but lower than fathers' share of engagement and accessibility as well. Thus, Pleck (1997) concludes that while the increase in paternal involvement observed in studies over the past three decades is not necessarily large in absolute terms, and fathers remain a long way from parity with mothers, there is substantial evidence to indicate increasing engagement, accessibility, and, to a lesser extent, increasing responsibility as well.

The more expansive, multivariate approach established by Lamb and colleagues (1985) thus represents an advance over previous, less differentiated conceptualizations, and offers an enhanced potential for exploration and theoretical insight. At the same time, further conceptualization is needed and the very utility of the construct in its original sense may now need to be reconsidered (Palkovitz, 1997). Indeed, although progress has been made in exploring the courses of paternal involvement, several important aspects have received remarkably little attention (Pleck, 1997). To move to this next level of conceptualization, future attempts to advance fatherhood scholarship should be initiated on several fronts, three of which deserve specific mention in the context of this analysis.

First, Lamb and colleagues' (1985) theoretical approach operationalizes father involvement in terms of frequency or quantity. As empirical research already has begun to reflect, this operationalization needs to be expanded. Specifically, in addition to
operationalizing father involvement in terms of quantity, the content or quality of paternal involvement must be assessed (Pleck, 1997). The interrelationship between these distinct dimensions also merits further research attention.

Second, relatively little has been done to advance our conceptualization of the diverse social psychological aspects of fathers' lives (Marsiglio, 1991). Paternal identity is an overarching construct that needs further development (Pleck, 1997). This approach can be developed by exploring the ways in which paternal involvement is embedded in fathers' own adult and life course development (Hawkins, Christiansen, Sargent, & Hill, 1995). Such a theoretical project would include attention to the symbolic meanings fathers attach to their paternal activities over the life course (Marsiglio, 1995b), as well as the nature of men's identification with the father role created and played out in connection to their relationship with the mother of their child(ren), their work identity, and their perceptions about the masculine male role (Marsiglio, 1995a; Pleck, 1997).

Third, future attempts to advance fatherhood scholarship should incorporate a view of paternal involvement as being both socially patterned and individualistic in nature (Marsiglio, 1995a). Large-scale social processes shape the opportunities and constraints that fathers experience as they embrace specific fatherhood roles. Thus, discussions of fathers' conduct ideally should consider their behavior within the larger social context that, to some extent, patterns experience. The gendered, class, and racial dimensions of these social processes are particularly important. Thus, for example, analyses of fatherhood could consider the ways in which gender ideologies legitimize the excuses and justifications fathers may use to account for their unavailability to children (LaRossa,
In addition, the intersection of fatherhood experiences with notions of racial identity and class status should inform future work.

In sum, conceptualizations of fatherhood are largely socially constructed, reflecting prevalent social imagery and trends. Fatherhood research, in turn, is influenced by these contextual forces, changing in response to cultural, economic, and institutional influences. In light of this context-oriented framework, now is a particularly useful time to study, in a more refined way, nonresidential fathers after divorce. This group, in many ways, encapsulates many of the sweeping demographic changes that have impacted American families. Enlightened assessments of this group, therefore, not only can provide needed insights for the study of divorce, but also holds out the promise for developing theoretical insights that will have broader applications to the more general study of fatherhood.

Nonresidential Fathering After Divorce

Divorce rates in the United States have been on the increase for a considerable period of time, climbing steadily since the mid-Nineteenth Century (Cherlin, 1992). The sharpest increases, however, began in the early 1960s, and climbed to an historic high in 1981 (National Center for Health Statistics, 1994). The rate has stabilized and even declined slightly since then, but still translates to somewhere between 40 and 62 percent of first marriages ending in divorce (Martin & Bumpass, 1989; National Center for Health Statistics, 1994; Norton & Miller, 1992).

These demographic trends are significant when viewed solely from the perspective of former marital partners. The implications of these trends multiply geometrically when children are factored into the analysis. Since most divorces involve children under the age 20
of 18 years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990), the issue has obvious societal ramifications. Indeed, approximately 6.6 million children live with a single parent after divorce (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994), with about 90 percent of these children residing with their mother (Doherty et al., 1996).

Given the prevalence of divorce in modern American society, and the serious societal and personal implications of its prominence, it is surprising to find that a significant piece of the divorce equation has been subjected to relatively little inquiry. Specifically, there is little information about the husband/father role after divorce (Kruk, 1994). And what we know about men's divorce adjustment largely has been derived from the study of middle-class women (Depner & Bray, 1990; Kitson & Holmes, 1992). For example, researchers and practitioners consistently have reported that women with custody of children, who have fewer financial resources and marketable skills, are at high risk for the negative economic effects of divorce (Arendell, 1987; Clarke-Stewart & Bailey, 1990; Weitzman, 1985). Likewise, feminist scholars have highlighted the role of gender-structured marriage in creating women's postdivorce vulnerability (Baber & Allen, 1992; Okin, 1989).

The Impact of Postdivorce Parenting on Father and Child Well-Being

Some limited inroads, however, have been made in assessing men's postdivorce experiences. For example, some preliminary evidence suggests that men, too, may be at risk for negative consequences of divorce (Albrecht, Bahr, & Goodman, 1983; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1976). Fatherhood appears to compound men's vulnerability to divorce. Because sole physical custody by the mother with paternal visitation is still the
most common child custody arrangement (even in cases of joint legal custody), most divorced fathers experience the loss of physical custody of their children.

Existing research on fathers' postdivorce adjustment suggests that being separated from their children is a particularly painful experience for divorced fathers that significantly affects their adjustment to divorce (Guttmann, 1989). For instance, Hetherington et al.'s (1976) classic longitudinal study of the effects of divorce on fathers suggests that divorced fathers who no longer live with their children undergo a substantial change in their self-concepts. Fathers complained of not knowing who they were, of being rootless, and of having no structure in their lives. This was accompanied by feelings of loss, guilt, anxiety, and depression. The most common concern of fathers who expressed these feelings was the sense of loss of their children. While Hetherington et al. (1976) provided one of the first suggestions of the magnitude of the stress experienced by divorced men as a result of separation from their children, subsequent research has documented similar results (Jacobs, 1982; Dominic & Schlesinger, 1980; Greif, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

While much of the early research focused attention on the adjustment problems many men face as a result of the transition from live-in to visiting parent, other studies have examined the potential benefits of postdivorce father-child contact for fathers. For example, Keshet and Rosenthal (1978) conducted an in-depth analysis of the phases ten fathers went through in their transition from married to single fatherhood. The insights gained from the men in this study revealed that men who have divorced from their wives and subsequently have taken some major responsibility for their children's care find that
the demands of that caretaking responsibility can become an important focus for their own
growth and development.

More recently, Stewart et al. (1986) provided another example of the benefits of
postdivorce father-child contact through their examination of the impact of custodial
arrangements on the adjustment of recently divorced fathers. Through the use of a
comparison design, these authors investigated the psychological adjustment of three
groups of men: (a) divorced fathers with custody of their children; (b) divorced fathers
without custody of their children; and (c) a comparison group of married fathers. The
study's findings indicated that custodial fathers exhibited fewer problems in adjustment
than those fathers without custody of their children. Moreover, the results demonstrated
that divorced fathers with custody of their children were similar to married fathers in terms
of their levels of psychological adjustment, whereas noncustodial divorced fathers differed
markedly from their married counterparts. These findings led Stewart et al. (1986) to
conclude that the presence of children appears to be a stabilizing force in the adjustment of
divorced fathers.

Although existing research thus clearly suggests that ongoing contact with children
has a positive influence for divorced fathers (D'Andrea, 1983; Dominic & Schlesinger,
1980; Keshet & Rosenthal, 1978; Stewart et al., 1986), the picture for the children is less
clear. Research relating fathers' postdivorce involvement to their children's well-being and
positive developmental outcome has produced somewhat inconsistent findings.
Specifically, numerous studies have documented the benefits to children's well-being of
frequent, meaningful contact with their noncustodial fathers (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox,
1976, 1982; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Moreover, several researchers have noted that children desire frequent interactions with their noncustodial fathers (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977; Neugebauer, 1989). At the same time, several studies -- particularly those based on large national surveys -- have found no association between father visitation and child well-being (Furstenberg et al., 1987; King, 1994; Zill, 1988).

These somewhat contradictory findings illustrate the complex nature of the impact of nonresidential father-child involvement on children's adjustment. Furthermore, these inconsistencies demonstrate the importance of family context (Bray & Berger, 1993). Highlighting the importance of contextual factors, Hetherington et al. (1976) concluded that frequent contact with the father is associated with positive adjustment of children when mothers and fathers agreed on parenting strategies, when there was low levels of inter-parental conflict, and when fathers exhibited emotional maturity.

More recently, King (1994) also illustrated the complex nature of the association between father involvement and child well-being. Utilizing data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, this study's findings corroborated other studies that found no association between father visitation and child well-being. The findings do indicate, however, that higher levels of child support payments are positively associated with higher perceived scholastic competence and with higher math and reading scores. Thus, on the basis of King's (1994) analysis, it appears that there is only limited evidence to support the hypothesis that nonresident father involvement has positive benefits for children. The strongest evidence is for the effect of child support in the domain of academics.
Descriptive Data on Paternal Involvement

The nature of the relationship that divorced fathers maintain with their children after divorce is paradoxical. In particular, there seems to be an internal inconsistency in fathers' postdivorce responses. Fathers' continued involvement with their children following divorce has been related to positive adjustment, for both fathers and children. Moreover, fathers often have expressed fear of the potential attenuation of their relationships with their children. At the same time, the research clearly indicates a significant and progressive decline in divorced fathers' contact with their children over time, beginning in the first year after divorce (e.g., Furstenberg et al., 1983; King, 1994; Seltzer, 1991; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993).

Quantitative documentation of this downward spiral in father-child relations is quite powerful and sobering. Specifically, nationally representative data on both payment of child support and frequency of visitation illustrates the disengagement that characterizes the postdivorce lives of so many fathers and children. As an initial matter, the research data are clear and consistent on the subject of child support. According to a recent report on child support by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1995), only 48% of mothers who are awarded child support by the courts receive the full amount due. The remainder are divided more or less equally between those who receive partial payment and those receiving nothing (Doherty et al., 1996). Furthermore, other research has found that, even if the child support is paid in full, the amounts awarded are not adequate to truly support a child given mothers' often low incomes (Rettig, Christensen, & Dahl, 1991).
With respect to frequency of visitation, early research painted a particularly bleak picture of nonresidential fathers' ongoing involvement in their children's lives. Using data from a nationally representative sample of U.S. children between the ages of 11 and 16 years, Furstenberg et al. (1983) found that over 50% of the children had not seen their parents in the preceding year. In addition, about 33% had monthly contact, and only 16% averaged weekly contact with their nonresidential fathers.

Three more recent national surveys similarly revealed a high level of paternal disengagement, although levels of declining involvement were not necessarily as steep and immediate as those discerned in the Furstenberg et al. (1983) study. First, Seltzer and Bianchi's (1988) analysis of the National Health Interview Survey and Child Health Supplement indicated that 35% of children living with their mothers never see their fathers; that an additional 24% see their fathers less than once a month; and that 20% maintain at least weekly contact. Second, using data from the National Survey of Families and Households, Seltzer (1991) reported that most children have little contact with their nonresidential fathers after divorce. In particular, 30% of children had no contact with their fathers in the past year, 30% saw their fathers only several times or less, and only 15% reported that they saw their fathers weekly. Finally, King (1994) examined nonresidential father involvement using the child supplement to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and found that her results with respect to frequency of nonresidential fathers' contact with their children after divorce were consistent with other studies using large national surveys. Specifically, NLSY data revealed variation in frequency of contact,
with almost one-third of the children failing to see their fathers in the past year, and another third seeing their fathers at least once a week.

These levels of disengagement have not always been replicated, however, in studies drawing nonprobability samples from other than national data sets. Rather, a variety of studies utilizing more narrowly drawn samples suggest levels of participation that are higher than documented on the basis of national surveys, and that, while children's contact with their nonresidential fathers declines over time, the visiting contact does continue for a majority of children. Kelly and Wallerstein (1977), for instance, studied sixty divorcing families in a five-year clinical research project and found that two-thirds of the children were visiting their noncustodial parent at least twice a month, with more than half of this group visiting one to three times per week. Likewise, Hetherington et al. (1976) reported that, two years after divorce, a majority of the forty-eight noncustodial parents in their sample saw their children weekly and over two-thirds saw their children at least every two weeks.

More recent research on paternal involvement also reveals levels of contact that are higher than national averages. For instance, Koch and Lowery (1985) studied a sample of thirty noncustodial fathers that was drawn from court records. Their findings indicated that, while varied visitation patterns were reported, for the majority of fathers, visiting was described as a regular pattern. Specifically, 50% of the fathers reported a pattern of weekly visitation, 20% reported visiting every other week, and 10% reported a monthly visiting schedule. In addition, 73% of the men reported paying child support regularly. Likewise, the noncustodial fathers in Ahrons and Miller's (1993) longitudinal
analysis of 64 pairs of former spouses maintained relatively frequent contact with their children. Indeed, 75% of the fathers in this sample visited their children at least bi-monthly.

Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, and Dornbusch (1993) provide a more comprehensive analysis in their 3-year longitudinal study of 1,124 divorcing families, as well as their follow-up study that focused on adolescent children. Collectively, their results indicated that most fathers remained substantially involved in their children's lives. In particular, Maccoby et al. (1993) reported that when they considered father-resident (9% of sample) and dual-resident (20% of sample) families along with mother-resident families (71% of sample) in which children visited their fathers during typical 2-week periods of the school year, they found that about two-thirds of the fathers remained physically present in their children's lives 3.5 years after parental separation. Moreover, even among families in which children lived with their mothers and did not visit their fathers during typical 2-week periods, there were many children who did see their fathers regularly during vacations and holidays.

Taken together, the nationally representative studies conducted over the last fifteen years suggest an alarming rate of fathers disengagement from their children's lives following divorce. Indeed, these data indicate that the majority of nonresidential fathers either lose contact with their children completely or maintain only infrequent and sporadic communication. In contrast, several studies that utilized relatively small samples from particular geographic regions suggested that, after divorce, nonresidential fathers maintain substantial contact. The variation in the findings of these studies is perhaps not surprising
given their divergent methodologies. Most prominently, these studies utilized samples of
differing size and composition and differed substantially in terms of the particular
perspective captured by the studies' designs.

In terms of sample size and composition, these factors alone may partially explain
the different findings. The studies conducted by both Koch and Lowery (1985) and
Ahrons and Miller (1993) utilized relatively small, white, middle-class samples from
individual geographic regions. Maccoby et al. (1993) sampled diverse families with
respect to their resources and life situations, but their sample is similarly limited in time
and place. Conclusions drawn from analyses of these more limited samples, therefore,
may not properly be generalized to all populations, and can be expected to differ from
conclusions derived from the national probability samples utilized by Furstenberg et al.

Perhaps more importantly, studies' findings can be expected to differ depending on
whether their design relies on reports from the mother, from the father, or from both. In
fact, extant research indicates that nonresidential fathers perceive themselves as having
more involvement with their children than residential mothers perceive them to have
(Ahrons & Miller, 1993; Braver et al., 1991; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994). In light of this,
it is not surprising that studies based on reports from both the father and the mother reveal
more substantial father-child contact after divorce than the national survey data that are
based largely on the reports of residential mothers.
Correlates of Fathers' Postdivorce Involvement

Among the first items of interest in studying noncustodial fathers was documenting the level of participation in the lives of their children (Depner & Bray, 1990). Whatever the current level of disengagement, very little is known about why it occurs. Thus, to begin to understand the dynamics of fathers' parental commitments over the life course, an increasing research interest has focused on understanding why fathers disengage from their children, identifying those factors that determine the levels of father involvement following divorce.

Pre-divorce parenting. It is commonly assumed that postdivorce father-child relationships will largely reflect those previously existing within the marriage (Kruk, 1991). That is, those fathers enjoying an active role with their children before divorce are the group most likely to have ongoing contact after divorce. Research on this topic, however, has produced somewhat inconsistent findings.

This presumption of a postdivorce father-child relationship that mirrors the relationship during marriage has some empirical support. In particular, Arditti and Keith (1993) used survey data from 212 divorced fathers randomly selected from court records and found that fathers who felt close to their children before divorce visited their children more frequently after divorce. Likewise, Greif (1995) provided another example of the continuity between fathers' parenting orientations before and after divorce through his examination of the circumstances that differentiate the situations of disengaged fathers who do not want additional contact with their children (n=14) as compared with the fathers who would like more contact (n=89). His analysis indicated that the men who did
not want more postdivorce contact with their children were significantly less involved in child care when they lived in the home.

Other studies, in contrast, have not found an association between fathers' pre and postdivorce parenting behaviors. Three studies, in particular, indicate that fathers' pre-divorce parenting does not necessarily predict continued involvement after divorce. First, in looking at patterns of contact between noncustodial fathers and their children at the point of divorce and one year later, Kelly and Wallerstein (1977) found that postdivorce visiting patterns were not strongly influenced by the quality of closeness of the pre-divorce relationship. Rather, factors associated with the divorcing process itself tended to have a central influence on the visiting patterns that emerged.

In a similar vein, Hoffman (1995) surveyed 106 noncustodial fathers. He found that although social support and cooperation of former spouses were predictive of postdivorce parenting, fathers' pre-divorce parenting was not related to their postdivorce involvements with their children.

Finally, in a cross-national survey Kruk (1991) explored the experiences of 80 noncustodial fathers, 40 defined as disengaged and 40 defined as in contact with their children. His data revealed a discontinuity between father-child relationships before and after divorce. Specifically, those fathers who were most involved with, and attached to, their children during marriage were most likely to lose contact after divorce. Conversely, those who were relatively less involved and attached during marriage were more likely to remain in contact after divorce. On the basis of these findings, Kruk (1991) argues that noncustodial fathers' disengagement from their children's lives after divorce results from a
combination of structural barriers and fathers' own psychological response to the loss of the close pre-divorce, father-child relationship.

**The effects of legal decisions.** Decisions about custody and visitation affect the contact between fathers and children, fathers' parenting identities, and the emotional experience of fathers after divorce. For example, joint legal custody is associated with more contact between fathers and their children, as well as with fathers' feeling closer to and more influential in their children's lives. Using a sample drawn from court records, Bowman and Ahrons (1985) compared the parenting one year after divorce of 28 joint custody fathers with 54 noncustodial fathers. The indicators of father involvement used in this study included (a) frequency and duration of time with children; (b) involvement in various parenting activities; and (c) frequency of parenting activities with former spouses. All three indicators of paternal involvement showed joint custody fathers to be more involved in postdivorce parenting than noncustodial fathers.

Similarly, Arditti (1992) compared the self-reported experiences of 171 noncustodial fathers and 41 joint custody fathers. Several variables significantly differentiated these two groups. Compared to noncustodial fathers, joint custody fathers saw their children more, felt closer to their children after the divorce, and were more satisfied with their custody status and the amount of time they were able to spend with their children.

There is, of course, a problem with self-selection in any study of joint custody (Bowman & Ahrons, 1985). Whether fathers who are more involved choose joint custody or whether the joint custodial arrangement facilitates more involvement after divorce -- or
some combination of these two factors -- remains an open question. In addition, it is unclear what aspect of the joint custodial arrangement contributes to fathers' satisfaction and involvement. The perspectives of several researchers help address these questions.

Mandell (1995) undertook an exploratory qualitative study in which she conducted three case studies of fathers who did not pay their court ordered child support. One participant argued for joint custody as a way to protect his access to his children and maintain his rights as a parent. At the same time, this participant did not expect joint physical custody nor did he want equal responsibility for parenting.

According to Bertoia and Drakich (1993), the rhetoric of the fathers' rights movement expresses similar sentiments. Their two-year study involved participant observation, ethnographic interviews, and document analysis. It revealed a view of joint custody that did not involve shared everyday care and responsibility for children, but rather liberal access, coupled with mothers' assumption of primary responsibility for child care. This approach, the study concluded, represented a continuation of fathers' parenting role prior to divorce.

Emery, Matthews, and Wyer's (1991) study comparing mediation with the traditional adversary system similarly informs an analysis of the implications of joint custody for fathers. A total of 35 mediation families and 36 litigation families were recruited from those parties requesting a child custody or visitation hearing from a domestic relations court. Families were randomly assigned to negotiate their disputes either in mediation or through the adversary system. Fathers in this study were consistently and substantially more satisfied with mediation than with litigation.
Interestingly, however, the settlements reached by the mediation and litigation groups did not differ in terms of the amount of time fathers were able to spend with their children. Thus, Emery and colleagues (1991) concluded that "voice" seems to be of considerable significance to fathers. In other words, joint custody represents an affirmation of their parental role, and is perhaps most important to fathers as a symbolic endorsement of paternal access and authority.

**The coparental relationship.** Much of the concern regarding noncustodial fathers' involvement with their children centers on the quality of the relationship between former spouses. Research that seeks to identify factors associated with nonresidential fathers' involvement with their children after divorce has suggested that the coparental relationship between ex-spouses is one key determinant in the level of overall postdivorce paternal involvement (Kurdek, 1986; McKenry et al., 1992; Wall, 1992; Wright & Price, 1986). For instance, McKenry et al. (1992) conducted a secondary analysis of data from the National Survey of Families and Households and found fathers' contact with their former spouses to be one variable related to more physical involvement with their children. In addition, Wall's (1992) retrospective survey of 80 noncustodial fathers identified relevant factors associated with these men's frequency of contact with their children following divorce. This study similarly indicated that noncustodial fathers' frequency of contact was greater when there was a low level of hostility between the ex-couple.

The relationship between former spouses not only has been related to fathers' frequency of visitation with their noncustodial children, but also has been associated with child support payments. Kurdek (1986), for example, illustrates the influence of inter-
parent conflict in his research on both visitation and payment of child support by noncustodial fathers. His multidimensional research surveyed 91 white custodial mothers and their children to compare families with low (n=47) and high (n=44) levels of pre-separation interparent conflict. Compared to fathers in low-conflict families, fathers in high-conflict families visited their children less regularly and were less reliable in their payment of child support.

Wright and Price (1986) further inform an analysis of former spouse relationship as it relates to child support compliance. Specifically, their study of 58 divorced parents hypothesized that when there is a greater level of attachment between former spouses and when they have a good relationship, timely compliance with child support orders is more likely. Their results confirmed these hypotheses, suggesting a particular postdivorce family pattern -- i.e., parents' continued attachment and high quality relationship -- in which noncustodial fathers are motivated to fulfill their responsibility to maintain financial support of their children.

Ahrons and Miller (1993) refine our understanding of the former spouse relationship as a mediator of fathers' postdivorce involvement in their children's lives through their longitudinal research design. Data from 64 pairs of former spouses revealed that the level of conflict and support between the former spouses had an important influence on the reorganizing process of these families. High levels of conflict and little cooperation tended to hinder father-child contact, whereas low conflict and high support facilitated continued father involvement in children's lives. Interestingly, the influence of conflict and support declined over a five-year period, suggesting that as patterns of
interaction in postdivorce families stabilize, the effects of the former spouse relationship become less pronounced.

Taken together, these studies support the notion that former spouses continue to exert an influence on each other after divorce. A primary way for them to do so is through visitation and child support payments, and conflict over these issues is common (Pasley & Minton, 1997). For example, custodial mothers may seek to capitalize on their role in determining the nature and extent of noncustodial fathers' visitation. Custodial mothers frequently act as "gatekeepers" of fathers' involvement with their children, often because fathers must go through these mothers in order to arrange visitation (Ahrsøn & Miller, 1993; Arditti, 1995). Moreover, many fathers perceive, rightly or wrongly, that mothers have a tremendous amount of power in determining their relationships with children after divorce, and they view this power differential as inequitable (Arditti & Allen, 1993; Arendell, 1992, 1995; Bertoia & Drakich, 1993; Greif, 1995; Umberson & Williams, 1993). In turn, payment, nonpayment, and delayed or reduced payment of child support are strategies that men use to influence former spouses in gaining access to children (Arendell, 1992, 1995; Mandell, 1995). Visitation and child support thus can become control strategies for former spouses, and such struggles may serve as obstacles to father involvement over time (Pasley & Minton, 1997).

Fathering after remarriage. When a remarriage occurs, fathering can become even more complex. Research indicates that the remarriage of either former spouse can affect postdivorce fathering. Seltzer et al. (1989), for example, found that remarriage on the part of noncustodial fathers decreases the likelihood that they will visit their children
frequently as well as decreases the amount of child support they pay. Likewise, Furstenberg et al. (1983) found that the level of contact between fathers and their children was much higher when the father remained single. Moreover, if both parents remarried, the level of children's contact with their nonresidential fathers dropped even further. On the basis of his analysis, Furstenberg et al. (1983) conclude that mothers' marital status has a greater effect than fathers' on the amount of contact fathers have with their biological children.

Thus, research most often has indicated declines in father-child contact when one or both parents remarry. Not all data, however, support this argument. Bray and Berger (1990), for example, found no differences in contact and relationship quality of nonresident fathers and their children. Their study used cross-sectional data obtained from 98 families in which the custodial mother had remarried. Differences emerged at neither 6 months post-remarriage, at 2.5 years post-remarriage, nor at 5 to 7 years post-remarriage. Bray and Berger (1993) uncovered additional -- and somewhat paradoxical -- findings from a longitudinal analysis of a subset of their original data set. Specifically, they tracked 78 families in which the custodial mother had remarried and found that, although children's contact with their fathers did decrease, the quality of the relationship improved during the same time frame.

Social support. Some research evidence suggests that a supportive social context is associated with fathers' postdivorce involvement with their children. For example, Hoffman (1995) surveyed 106 noncustodial fathers regarding influences on their parenting relationships with their children. As expected, support and cooperation from their ex-
wives were related to postdivorce parenting. In addition, fathers' positive ratings of social support for their postdivorce involvement with their children from family, friends, other close relations, and at work were predictive of their involvement, closeness, satisfaction, and effectiveness with their children. Pasley and Minton (1997) also report that preliminary findings from their research point to the relationship between social support and father involvement. They found that among divorced, nonresident fathers, those who reported receiving more encouragement also reported more involvement in child-rearing activities.

**Structural and demographic influences.** A variety of structural and demographic factors have been linked to fathers' involvement in their children's lives after divorce. Research has identified four factors that appear to be particularly influential. First, perhaps most obviously, geographic proximity is a powerful predictor of postdivorce paternal contact. Not surprisingly, research indicates that geographic proximity seems to facilitate fathers' ability to engage in a meaningful role with their noncustodial children. The closer fathers live to their children, the more frequent their visits (Arditti & Keith, 1993; Furstenberg et al., 1983; McKenry et al., 1992). Second, socioeconomic status, especially as measured by level of education, is a strong predictor of patterns of contact between nonresidential fathers and children. For instance, Furstenberg et al. (1983) found that failure to complete high school was associated with lack of father-child contact, whereas contact was more regular among college-educated fathers. It is noteworthy, however, that fathers' assumption of postdivorce child rearing responsibility is not related to the educational level of the mother. Third, Wall (1992) identified age as an additional
factor influencing the frequency of contact. Results of his study indicated that older fathers are more likely to have frequent contact with their children after divorce. Fourth, Wall (1992) also identified length of marriage as an important factor. Specifically, the longer fathers had been married to their first spouses, the more contact they had with their children.

**Relationship between visitation and child support.** Issues of child custody, child support, and nonresidential parental visitation are intertwined. Researchers' efforts to understand these interconnections is illustrated by studies that examine the relationship between child support and visitation. Seltzer et al. (1989) attempted to identify the general causal structure of the relationship between visiting and child support using a subsample of 180 mothers from the 1985 Wisconsin Children, Incomes, and Program Participation Survey. Their analysis indicated that common demographic causes (i.e., mother's education and income, father's education, residential proximity, child's age, time since separation) explain much, but not all, of the association between visitation and child support. Their data also suggests weak support for the hypothesis that visiting and child support are complementary -- that is, engaging in one behavior increases the utility and benefits of engaging in the other.

Furstenberg et al.'s (1983) data likewise suggest a relationship between the provision of child support and the frequency of paternal contact. In their study, the level of contact between fathers and children was especially low when the father failed to provide any support whatsoever. Thus, Furstenberg et al. (1983) concluded that the fact
of support per se, rather than the amount of support, seems to be related to maintenance of father-child ties.

Indications of the precise relationship between visitation and child support, however, are not definitive. In fact, Seltzer et al. (1989) argue that because their analysis does not include all of the demographic variables that may affect both visitation and paying child support, alternate interpretations of the data cannot necessarily be ruled out. Furthermore, not all research supports the notion of a causal relationship between visitation and paying child support. Arditti and Keith (1993) hypothesized that more frequent father-child contact would lead to higher visitation quality and greater child support payments. Although visitation frequency was associated with visitation quality, visitation frequency was not associated with greater payment of child support. Rather, payment was predicted by structural variables such as fathers' socioeconomic status and proximity of physical residence.

Weaknesses and Gaps in the Literature

As this review has demonstrated, existing research has documented the level of participation of noncustodial fathers in the lives of their children after divorce, and has begun to identify those factors that determine the levels of father involvement. These works have provided important information, yet research to date has limitations and, largely as a result, significant gaps in our knowledge remain. The limits of the existing, largely descriptive, research cluster around three broad themes.
Measuring and conceptualizing paternal involvement

Fathers' postdivorce parenting tends to be operationalized as visitation frequency or child support payment and/or compliance (Arditti, 1995). The focus of much of the research to date, therefore, has been limited to indicators of father-child contact and formal financial support. This focus has not necessarily allowed for exploration of the challenges that fathers negotiate as they attempt to parent children who live in another household, nor has it allowed for ample examination of the qualitative aspects of parenting postdivorce. We do not, for instance, have a real sense of the quality of relations between fathers and children after divorce. Bray and Berger (1993) pointed out that the quantity of paternal participation is only loosely indicative of the quality of relations between fathers and children. Indeed, they found that children's contact with their nonresident fathers decreased over time, but the quality of the relationship improved during the same time frame. As the findings of this study illustrate, even if relationship quality and visitation frequency are highly related, they apparently are tapping into two distinct conceptual domains (Arditti, 1995).

Fox and Blanton (1995) have suggested that our limited understanding of the quality of father-child relations postdivorce reflects our limited conceptual understanding of fatherhood more broadly. For example, when examining fathers' parenting postdivorce, we may be measuring the parenting transitions prompted by the residential changes accompanying divorce, or we may be measuring the more general issue of gendered constructions of parenting (Arditti, 1995; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). Future research
thus needs to more fully disentangle the effects of residence and gender on the quality of father-child relations.

As a central principle of social relations, gender (Ferree, 1990; Zinn, 1990) can be expected to differentially pattern the postdivorce experiences of women and men (Gerstel, 1988; Riessman, 1990). Women and men can be expected to have contrasting experiences, perceptions, and outcomes of divorce (Demo & Ganong, 1994). Yet, to date, there is a paucity of research based on father report (Dudley, 1991; Kruk, 1994; Marsiglio, 1995a). Indeed, there has been a tendency to sample former wives regarding fathers' contact with their children, and Dudley (1991) notes that, in general, "fathers' views and interpretations surrounding divorce represent a significant lacuna in the research" (p. 18). Similarly, Wark et al. (1994) note that in-depth qualitative accounts of men's experiences of divorce are greatly lacking. Given the significant role that gender may, and likely does, play, this absence of fathers' voices is a serious methodological shortcoming.

Diversity and process

Research on nonresidential fathers' relations with their children following divorce has been influenced by functionalist assumptions that equate legal and residential status with certain relationship properties (Scanzoni, Polonko, Teachman, & Thompson, 1989). As a result, this body of literature has focused largely on family structure and residential status to the exclusion of attention to the specific opportunities and constraints presented to fathers and children who occupy various positions on a continuum of physical closeness (Arditti, 1995). The diversity of circumstances noncustodial fathers find themselves in
postdivorce, and the influence of social stratifiers such as race, socioeconomic status, and
gender on the nature and extent of paternal participation, remains virtually ignored
(Arditti, 1995). In addition, currently there exists an increasing need to conceptualize
divorce as a process that occurs within the life course of children and adults (Demo &
Ganong, 1994: Scanzoni et al., 1989). This sort of process approach focuses attention on
the manner of negotiating the transition to noncustodial parenting, as well as on the
dynamics of changing relationships over time.

Theoretical integration

The research examining potential reasons that divorced fathers fail to maintain
more frequent contact with their children has tended to be atheoretical, focusing on
assorted variables that are associated with levels of father involvement (Stone, 1994).
Such research efforts can provide useful information, but the findings related to divorce
often are represented in a somewhat fragmented manner with no underlying theory to
connect the salient concepts (Depner & Bray, 1993). Moreover, attempts to isolate
variables that, in reality, are interrelated in a complex fashion, or to determine linear
causality when, in fact, intricate patterns of interaction prevail, have made it difficult to
piece research findings together into a comprehensive understanding (Mandell, 1995).
Thus, there is still a need to provide a comprehensive theoretical base, as well as a
contextualized understanding of, fathers' postdivorce involvement.

Theoretical Treatments of Postdivorce Fathering

The beginnings of such an effort can be seen in two recent works. First, Ihinger-
Tallman, Pasley, and Buehler (1993) base their middle-range theory of postdivorce father
involvement on the principles of symbolic interaction and identity theory. These authors theorize that fathers experience a change in parenting role identity as a result of the loss of daily contact with their children that most often accompanies divorce. This change in identity is responsible for the extent to which fathers stay involved with their children. Furthermore, Ihinger-Tallman et al. (1993) identify several variables that are expected to moderate the relationship between father parenting role identity and actual involvement after divorce. The proposed moderating variables include: (a) mothers' preferences and beliefs; (b) fathers' perceptions of mothers' parenting skills; (c) fathers' emotional stability; (d) mothers' emotional stability; (e) sex of child; (f) co-parental relationship; (g) fathers' economic well-being and employment stability; and (h) support and encouragement from significant others.

Early investigations into the validity of this theoretical model have provided initial empirical support. Specifically, Ihinger-Tallman et al. (1993) surveyed 76 nonresidential fathers in North Carolina regarding their parenting role identities and levels of involvement with their children. Father involvement was operationalized as father contact with child, and was measured as frequency of visits, writing letters and paying child support. The reported correlation between father parenting role identity and father involvement was .34 (p<.01). Further analysis using additional measures of father involvement (i.e., an additional survey that rated 11 different parenting activities), resulted in a correlation of .39 (p<.01) between these summed items and father parenting role identity. Based on these analyses, Ihinger-Tallman et al. (1993) conclude that initial tests of the basic
relationship between father parenting role identity and father involvement behavior provide support for the theory.

Second, Braver et al. (1993) propose a social exchange approach to predicting nonresidential parents' involvement with their children after divorce. Utilizing the central theoretical tenets of a social exchange model, these authors hypothesize that, at the point of divorce, the nonresidential parent evaluates whether to maintain a relationship with the child in terms of the relationship's anticipated costs and its perceived rewards. That is, the greater the perceived rewards and the less the perceived costs of the parent-child relationship, the greater the parental involvement is predicted to be. This theoretical model conceptualizes rewards and costs as clustering around three primary categories: (a) affectional or interpersonal; (b) material or tangible; and (c) symbolic or moral. After reviewing the extant research, Braver et al. (1993) report that the existing empirical evidence is generally consistent with the hypotheses generated from their model. Thus, these authors conclude that their model is a plausible and productive mechanism to organize existing data. At the same time, Braver et al. (1993) emphasize that their theorizing is at only a preliminary stage, and note that they currently are engaged in a large-scale effort to evaluate the model more definitively.

Conclusion

The body of work to date thus exhibits only the very beginnings of the necessary effort at bringing a theoretical grounding to the analysis of fathers' postdivorce experiences. Although this theory development is only in its nascent stage, we already can see that it will have even greater potential if it incorporates a fuller appreciation of gender.
and its interrelationships with fatherhood and divorce. That is, the work to date has not
identified gender as a central category of analysis explicitly, but gender's strong presence
lurks just off-stage. For example, gender is not the express. · · · · · · · · us in either the fathers'
parenting role identity or the social exchange theoretical approaches discussed above. Yet
we know that fathers' identity necessarily stems from their sense of themselves as men.
(Marsiglio, 1995a). Likewise, gender directly impacts exchange processes in families
(Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991).

In this dissertation, therefore, I expand on such theory development by consciously
applying a gender-based theoretical framework. This not only meets the need that I have
identified to build the inquiry on a strong theoretical foundation, but also begins to fill
some of the other significant gaps in the research to date. Perhaps most prominently, this
study gives voice to fathers and attempts to capture the depth and complexity inherent in
their postdivorce experiences. In the process, I begin to bridge understandings of
fatherhood, gender, and divorce.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this study is to address theoretical and substantive questions about the experiences of noncustodial fathers after divorce. This research is part of a larger project funded by The Marion, Ohio Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Board, and conducted under the direction of Dr. Patrick C. McKenry, Professor in the Departments of Family Relations and Human Development and Black Studies at The Ohio State University. This qualitative study draws primarily on in-depth interview data. In the process of conducting these interviews, each participant also was asked to complete three paper and pencil standardized instruments. Examination of these quantitative measures, however, were not used for the analysis in this study. The interview narratives themselves allowed for development of a feminist-informed analysis of the experiences and perceptions of divorced fathers.

Sample

The sample population was selected from the files of all previous participants in a Marion County, Ohio divorce education project. This project, known as Parents' Education About Child's Emotions (PEACE), is a two and one-half hour workshop
dealing with postdivorce parenting issues. Since 1990, all divorcing parents with children under the age of 14 in Marion County have been required to participate in PEACE. After their participation in the PEACE program, participants were asked if they would be willing to be contacted to take part in any follow-up research study related to the program. From the positive responses, a stratified (by race) random sample of 25 divorced fathers was selected. Each of these men was contacted by letter to request their participation. A follow-up telephone call then was placed to confirm willingness to participate and to schedule an initial interview. Of the initial group of 25, one refused to participate because of a lack of interest, two had moved away from the area, one had reconciled with his former spouse, and one scheduled, but failed to attend, two interviews. All others agreed to participate in the study, resulting in a final sample size of 20 nonresidential fathers.

As indicated in Table 1, of these 20, 15 had been divorced between one and three years and five had been divorced for more than three years. These men had fathered between one and three children with their former spouses and, at the time that the study began, their children's ages averaged 10.2 years. The fathers' ages at the outset of the study ranged from 25 to 48 years with an average of 37. Moreover, at the time that the data collection began, 10 (50%) of these fathers were single, seven (35%) had remarried, and three (15%) were cohabitating. Regarding socioeconomic status, the sample included individuals from upper, middle, and lower income levels. The annual incomes ranged from $9,240 to $160,000, with a mean of $50,612 and a median of $36,000.

Two additional features of this sample are particularly noteworthy. First, the fathers in this sample reported that they maintained relatively frequent contact with their
children. Five (25%) had seen their children five or more times in the past month, six (30%) had seen them three or four times, five (25%) had seen them twice, two (10%) had seen them once, and only two (10%) of the fathers had not seen their children at all in the past month. This level of contact is well above national averages. Second, all of the study participants are white. We did actively seek to interview African American men, intentionally choosing two as potential interviewees. One refused to participate because of an expressed lack of interest, and the other scheduled, but neglected to attend two interviews. This demographic attribute represents the most notable limitation of this sample.

Notwithstanding these features, in many ways, Marion County is an ideal geographic region from which to draw a divorce study sample. Two characteristics combine to make Marion a particularly fitting alternative. First, Marion County's divorce education program for parents (PEACE) is widely regarded as one of the best in the state. Moreover, because this program is court mandated for all divorcing parents, selecting fathers from the group participating in the program helps minimize sample selection bias. Specifically, identifying research participants in this manner ensures that fathers committed enough to pursue voluntary postdivorce parenting education programs are not overrepresented. Second, Marion County is evenly split between rural and urban populations, and has a good mix of low, middle, and high income groups (U. S. Census Bureau, 1996). The varied demographics of this source population provide a useful cross-section of Midwestern lifestyles. Not all of the demographic features of this Midwestern County, however, are as beneficial to the goal of obtaining a diverse sample population.
Specifically, the racial mix of Marion is substantially different than national averages. Marion County is a particularly homogeneous community, with a population that is 95% white and only 4% Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 1996).

The sample utilized in this study is demographically similar to the population of Marion County as a whole. For example, in 1989 the median family income for residents of Marion was $30,567 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1996); at the time of the first interviews, the median income of the participants in this study was $36,000. Moreover, the absence of Black fathers from this sample is not surprising in light of the relatively low percentage of Blacks in Marion County. Additional sample characteristics are listed in Table 1 at the end of this chapter.

Data Collection

Interviews

The primary source of data for this study was in-depth interviews. Research participants were interviewed twice -- the 20 fathers participating in this study were interviewed in 1994, and fourteen of these fathers took part in follow-up interviews approximately three years later. Six fathers were unable to participate in the second interviews. Four attributed their inability to participate to difficult work schedules, and I was unable to reach the remaining two.

The initial interviews were conducted by three interviewers -- two female and one male -- and lasted from two to three hours. Each began with a standard questionnaire that asked for basic demographic information such as the father's age, composition of his household, length of his marriage, number of years he had been divorced, and age and sex
of his children. This beginning section of the interview was important for the basic information that it provided, but also as a time to build rapport, enabling the men to relax and begin to talk about themselves.

Once these initial data were obtained, the interviews proceeded to explore these fathers' perceptions and experiences as noncustodial fathers. The interviews can be considered as semi-structured because they were guided by a set of topics that were to be addressed (Berg, 1989). Questions generally were open-ended, with follow-up probes designed to direct the participants' attention to the major domains of interest. Specifically, the interview questions focused on (a) relationships with wives and children before the divorce; (b) changes in relationships with children after the divorce; (c) conflicts with former spouses; (d) perceptions of the divorce process and sense of equity with respect to divorce outcomes; (e) subjective experiences of change (i.e., emotional well-being) since the divorce; (f) economic well-being; (g) views of the parental role; (h) parenting attitudes and skills; and (i) social support. Moreover, corresponding to the study's theoretical framework and research questions, the interviews were designed to generate a focused exploration of fathers' constructions of gender in the context of divorce. Recognizing that the ways in which men construct gender cannot easily be tapped empirically (Komter, 1989), the interviews sought to develop domains embedded within the participants' ideological underpinnings of gender. Thus, the interviews were designed to elicit concepts central to gender relations of power such as authority, control, and sense of equity.

The follow-up interviews all were conducted by this researcher. These interviews are particularly important to the study since the theoretical foundation guiding this
research suggests the need to devote attention to the ongoing interactional process of creating and recreating gender in families (Connell, 1987, 1995). This need is addressed through the study's longitudinal design. The follow-up interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, and were specifically designed to examine the dynamics of changing relations over time. The interviews were organized around four specific domains of interest: First, each interview began with questions designed to update pertinent demographic information, such as marital status, occupation, income, and custody status. The follow-up interviews then proceeded to explore (a) changes in relationships with former spouses and children, (b) additional contacts with the legal system, and (c) new intimate relationships.

**Standardized Measures**

After completion of the initial interview, each participant was asked to complete three paper and pencil, standardized instruments: The SCL-90 (Derogatis, Lipman, & Covi, 1973) to assess mental status; the Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (Selzer, 1971) to measure alcohol use; and the Sex-Role Modernity Questionnaire (Scanzoni, 1978) to measure gender role attitudes. As discussed earlier, these quantitative measures were not utilized in this study's analysis.

**Data Analysis**

All interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. In addition, field notes were made during and after both sets of interviews. These notes provide a written account of the researcher's impressions, speculations, and feelings during the interview process. As such, the notes are useful not only as documentation of the data collection.
process, but also as a resource in data analysis (Bogden & Biklen, 1992). The field notes were transcribed into a format similar to the interview data.

A qualitative content analysis process was applied to the research data. In short, this process begins with identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data (Patton, 1990). It then turns to examination of the data to identify analytic themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) related to the study's theoretical grounding in feminist perspectives on constructions of gender in families.

Specifically, the interview narratives were analyzed using the NUDIST program for analysis of qualitative data. Each transcript was examined for salient topics covered, as well as for regularities and patterns both within and across cases (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). To represent these topics and patterns, initial coding categories -- i.e., broad topical categories such as experiences with the legal system and postdivorce challenges to parenting -- then were developed. Next, the transcripts were coded into more specific and theoretically focused analytic themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) such as postdivorce challenges to men's sense of entitlement and the constraints that social class position impose on men as they negotiate postdivorce relationships.

This analytic process utilized a combination of inductive and deductive methods. In particular, the data were analyzed inductively, so that information, coding categories and theoretical themes could emerge from the participants' own perceptions and subjective interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). At the same time, deductive methods were a part of the process because the analysis was guided by a pre-established theoretical framework.
Summary and Limitations

Drawing primarily on in-depth interviews with a group of divorced fathers, this study makes strides toward filling gaps in the work to date. And the fact that the group was interviewed on two occasions, approximately three years apart, gives this study an ability to assess more fully the evolutionary characteristics of postdivorce relationships.

Although it has the potential to begin to rectify existing theoretical and methodological flaws, this study does have several inherent limitations. As an initial matter, there is a demographic limitation to the sample itself -- most notably, all of the study participants are white. To a large extent, this racial composition reflects the overall racial composition of Marion County, from which the sample was drawn. Moreover, as noted earlier, efforts to secure minority representation through targeted inclusion of African American men were unsuccessful. Nonetheless, the all-white make-up of the sample impairs this study's ability to fully theorize gender. No person can experience gender without simultaneously experiencing race and class (Collins, 1990; West & Fenstermaker, 1995), and the demographic limitations of the sample necessarily mean that at least some aspects of this simultaneity have eluded this study's theoretical treatments (Anderson, 1996).

In addition, the use of a relatively small sample from a single geographic region raises questions of generalizability. For example, it may not be possible to say, from a statistical perspective, that the experiences of this sample are typical of a broader population. Such claims of representativeness can be made only through utilization of a comparative study drawn on national data. While the inability to make such claims could
be seen as a serious limitation, qualitative research does not purport to present analyses that can be, with rigid statistical validity, generalized to a broader population. Rather, qualitative research adopts the distinct goal of generating theoretical insight. By filling conceptual gaps, it may be possible to develop knowledge that will be relevant to a broad range of families.

Finally, although this study utilizes a longitudinal design, the time period it addresses is only about three years. This is a particularly short time in light of the study's attempt to address process — i.e., explore the fluid nature of postdivorce family relationships. The evolving nature of gender relations in postdivorce families likely cannot be fully captured in a time period limited to three years. It therefore may be necessary to utilize a longer time horizon in future research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M = 36.9 (SD = 4.9)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>M = 9.2 (SD = 3.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Length of marriage</strong></td>
<td>M = 1.75 (SD = .6)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children</strong></td>
<td>M = 10.2 (SD = 3.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age of children</strong></td>
<td>M = 3.1 (SD = 2.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time since divorce</strong></td>
<td>M = 37.9 (SD = 68.2)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Distance children live away</strong></td>
<td>M = $50,612. (SD = $38,445.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td>M = 438. per month (SD = $265.)</td>
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<td><strong>Child Support</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>First Marriage</strong></td>
<td>13 Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 No</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td>10 Divorced/single</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3 Divorced/cohabiting</td>
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<td>7 Remarried</td>
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<td><strong>Sex of Children</strong></td>
<td>5 Females</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5 Males</td>
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<td>10 Both females and males</td>
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<td><strong>How often seen child in past month</strong></td>
<td>2 None</td>
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<td>2 Once</td>
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<td>6 Three or four times</td>
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<td>5 More than four times</td>
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Table 3.1

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SAMPLE (N=20)
CHAPTER 4

NEGOTIATING THE DIVORCE EXPERIENCE: FATHERS' ACCOUNTS OF THEIR PRE- AND POSTDIVORCE RELATIONSHIPS

Family Relationships Before Divorce

In this chapter, I take the experiences of divorced fathers as the starting point. The data analysis begins with a descriptive focus, laying out the major themes that emerged from the research participants' narratives. Attending closely to what these men say about their subjective experience of divorce ultimately allows us to see how internalized expectations about marriage and fatherhood are bound up in fathers' postdivorce adaptations. Moreover, to fully understand the meaning of divorce in these fathers' lives, I begin with a description of the ways in which they recollect their family relationships before divorce. Men's perceptions of the social organization of their marriages provide a critical context within which to consider questions about divorce and its impact on family relationships and gendered family structures (Riessman, 1990).

The men in this study were asked to characterize their involvement and relationships with their children when they were married. In addition, the interviews invariably involved descriptions of the participants' relationships with their ex-wives, both
before and after the divorce. Particular attention was paid to the sources and amount of conflict in the marital relationships.

It is important to note several significant caveats that should be kept in mind in assessing the data and seeking to draw conclusions from them. First, these data do not, and cannot, give us a definitive explanation of what "causes" divorce. Answers to that complex question would require an in-depth analysis of historical and demographic data, as well as more comprehensive narrative life histories from the men themselves (Kurz, 1995). Second, the perspective of the speaker is important. Existing research clearly indicates that there are "his" and "her" versions of marriage and divorce based on the different social positions of men and women in the family (Arendell, 1995; Bernard, 1972; Riessman, 1990). Thus, these men's accounts most likely differ significantly from those of their ex-wives.

Predivorce Relationships with Children

In describing their predivorce relationships, the fathers participating in this study discussed, with great frequency, issues relating to their feelings of emotional connection to their children. Indeed, all but two fathers in this sample reported that they felt very close to their children before the divorce, and the two fathers who did not report this sort of intense emotional attachment were both divorced before their children were born. For example, in the course of exploring his life before divorce, one father described his relationship with his daughter in this way:

Well, we've been close from day one. I mean hunt, fish, work on cars . . . . Yeh, you name it. It don't make any difference what we did, we done this as one more than as two. We was like my dad and I -- we was almost inseparable.
Another father related his sense of devotion to his children to his vulnerable marital relationship:

I was a real father and I really don't give a damn what anybody says or what anybody thinks. I knew what I did for my children. Completely, totally 100%, I gave as much as I possibly could. I gave much more than other fathers that I know . . . . In a sense because the relationship with my wife was failing, I put everything into the children.

One father who divorced before his daughter was born similarly described a sense of satisfaction about the intense emotional bond he and his daughter share. Moreover, he characterized this bond as natural and almost effortless:

I would term the relationship that we have as close to perfect as you can imagine . . . . We just have a tremendous bond. We do everything together. She's totally a daddy's girl . . . . It's been as close to perfect as I ever would have hoped for . . . . It comes very natural.

The fathers participating in this study also framed their narrative descriptions of their predivorce relationship with their children in terms of the division of labor with respect to child care and their daily involvement in the children's lives. A clear majority of the fathers interviewed perceived themselves as having substantial involvement in the day-to-day care of their children when they were married. For example, one father talked about his extensive involvement in caring for his infant daughter:

Jane was not a settled child. Nothing was wrong with her physically that we knew of or anything else, but she just wouldn't settle. For a year and a half I never had a complete night's sleep. There were many nights that I was up four and five hours a night. My wife was lying in bed sleeping . . . . and I would be up in a rocking chair for four and five hours . . . . That's the involvement that I had with my child.
Likewise, when asked about his predivorce involvement in the care of his children, another father responded:

My wife was always -- it seemed to me that she was gone a lot. She had a late kind of job. She worked at a retail store at the mall. So she'd be gone for meeting and out of town visits as a sales rep. It was me and the kids. I usually fixed dinner and did a lot of the laundry. There was some friction there at times but it was pretty normal.

Moreover, several of these fathers considered themselves the primary parent in their married families. I asked one father if he believed that he and his wife equitably co-parented their son before the divorce. His response was consistent with the general tendency on the part of the fathers in this study to highlight their involvement in family work:

I mean, my ex-wife works. She teaches school. Our schedules allowed me to spend more time with him. I got him up and I fed him breakfast, packed his lunch, took him to school. When he was sick, more often than not I'd take him to work with me and could rearrange my schedule or something along those lines. I took him to the babysitter before he went to school. I picked him up. My ex-wife, for the last four years of our marriage, pretty much came home from school and went up to her room. You know, so I spent the evenings -- I fed him dinner, I watched TV with him, I did his homework with him.

In contrast, only three fathers talked about the constraints that their work schedules imposed on their relationships with their children. Of these three, two fathers recognized that their time with their children was limited because of the demands of their work, but they nevertheless felt close to and involved in their children's lives. One, for example, portrayed his situation as that of a "normal" family and said that "before the divorce I was a normal working [father], but the only thing is I worked a lot. I worked 60 to 70 hours a week, come home at night, spent nights with my kids." In the same vein,
when asked about his relationship with his children while married, another of these three fathers responded:

I think we were very close. I mean we did things on the weekend when we could . . . . I think they understood at the time that I couldn't be with them as long as their mother was. She had sort of an advantage that way. Working in the same school system, getting home at 3:30, basically when they were home. Being there throughout the evening hours, playing with them, letting them play on their own, whatever the case would be. I just wasn't able to spend that much time with them.

Only one father in this sample explicitly expressed regret in his narrative account of his parenting before divorce. This father took responsibility for many of his family problems, and when asked about his relationship with his son prior to his divorce responded:

It was good but I did not spend enough time with him . . . . [I was] caught up in work and unfortunately I didn't do a very good job . . . . There were things I had never done you know that my ex-wife had done with him and I was always too busy to do because I didn't make him a priority. I could have, okay, very easily, but I didn't. So from that standpoint I needed to get better, just to make it a priority. And now I have to.

**Predivorce Relationships with Spouses**

Perhaps not surprisingly for a group of divorced individuals, the majority of the participants in this study cast their marital relationships in somewhat oppositional terms. That is, most of these men described themselves in positive terms, and characterized their ex-wives rather negatively. The men's descriptions clustered around two primary themes. First, a recurring theme for the study participants was the division of labor in their marriages. About half of these fathers expressly identified the division of labor as equal. For instance, when asked if he shared responsibilities equally with his former spouse, one participant replied, "Oh yeh, at least 50/50 if not more." He then elaborated in this way:
"I mean, it might have been 60/40 because I wasn't there all the time. I tried to do what I could. I tried to do a lot of things there to make it a little easier on her."

Another father talked about the influence of his wife's disability on his participation in family work. He portrayed himself as very involved in caring for their home and children, both when his wife was healthy and after she became ill:

I always participated. I mean, even when my wife was healthy, I changed diapers and I was responsible for the baths and I took the kids to day care and maybe she picked them up on the way home. So it's always been a pretty even split.

A number of other men, although not explicitly identifying the division of labor in their families as equal, suggested in their narrative accounts that they contributed significantly to the work involved in raising children and running a household. Indeed, one father claimed, "I washed dishes and cooked and cleaned the house. If I didn't do it, it wouldn't get done." When asked how he and his wife divided household responsibilities, another participant responded, "They just got done. We didn't really divide them. The only thing I didn't do was iron." Although another father perceived himself as participating fully in family work, he did seem to recognize that he embraced some jobs more fully than others:

It was definitely 50/50 with the kids. I can let the bathroom go for three weeks before we cleaned it and after a week and a half my wife would have to clean it because she couldn't stand it. So her cleaning concepts were different than mine. Therefore, she cleaned more because she felt like it was dirty and wanted to clean it. But then I took out the garbage and mowed the lawn, so . . . .
Of the fathers participating in this study, only one spoke expressly about the
gender-structured division of labor in his home. When talking about work both inside and
outside the home, this man described his situation in this way:

Well, after my daughter was born [my wife] worked outside the home . . . . A lot
of that kind of [household] stuff was shared. I feel she probably did most of it. But
we both came from families with the old stereotypes -- this is what the woman did
and this is what the man did . . . . But reality also says that you can't live by that
old stereotype when two people are working.

A second theme concerning predivorce relationships reflected in these narratives is
the perception of the wife as primarily responsible for the failure of the marriage. Of the
men in this study, approximately 75% held their ex-wives accountable for their divorces.
For example, seven of the men expressly identified their wives' extra-marital affairs as the
cause of divorce. One man described the circumstances that led to his divorce in this way:

I knew for a long time that she was seeing somebody else, but she wouldn't admit
it and I'd rather let it go. One little fling and just forget about it. But they got
down to where I didn't have any choice. I offered to forget about things and stuff,
but when it came down to it, she left me for her first cousin . . . I guess I could
understand a person maybe falling in love with somebody else as a stranger or
individual, but when you come to a family type relationship and doing something
like that within a family, then I couldn't accept it.

Another man who participated in this study was married to and divorced from the same
woman twice. According to this participant, both marriages ended as a result of his wife's
infidelity:

She had found somebody else the first time. She never admitted it but she did.
Second time I caught her in the act and I asked her . . . she decided she wanted a
divorce . . . . She made her decision. It hurt the same as it did the first time, but
this time I had already been through it before. I didn't lose any tears when I left. I
never looked back. My head wasn't up, but it wasn't down.
In addition, eight other participants in this study pointed to their wife's emotional and mental instability and alcohol abuse as fundamental problems. For example, one man claimed:

The reason we got divorced is that she wanted to go out and drink instead of staying home . . . . [Jane] was the type that all she wanted to do was go out and drink. I put up with that probably three years, finally I had enough . . . . I look at it as when you got a family, you act like you got a family. I mean if you want to go out drinking, partying, and do whatever, you better be single and without kids.

Another man talked about the marital strain that resulted from his wife's problems:

Like I was telling you, she had her problems . . . . And I was married to her for eight years before I realized she was anorexic or bulimic . . . . She was constantly having migraine headaches. I was constantly taking her to the doctor and she'd get these special pills and sometimes they would work and sometimes they wouldn't.

When asked about the sources of conflict in his marriage, another man responded by describing his wife's deceptions and irresponsible behavior:

I spent a lot more time with the kids on the weekends than I did through the week. And she took a little advantage of that from time to time. And she said, "Gee, you know some of the people I work with are going to be at the [restaurant] tonight. I'd like to go out with the girls. I want you to stay home with the kids." She went out with the girls. She started going out with the guys and I caught her doing that a couple of times. She'd come home so blatantly drunk that she didn't even know that she was wearing another man's jacket when I pointed that out to her.

The principal reasons that these 20 men gave for their divorce are represented in Figure 4.1.
Figure 4.1

REASONS GIVEN FOR DIVORCE
Postdivorce Family Relationships

Because sole custody by the mother with paternal visitation is still the most common custody arrangement (even in cases of joint legal custody), most divorced fathers experience the loss of physical custody of their children. The custodial arrangements of the fathers in this study reflect this general trend. Specifically, when these 20 fathers were first interviewed, 16 of them defined themselves as the noncustodial parent — that is, these men's ex-wives were legally awarded physical custody of their children, and the fathers visit their children on a schedule either set by the court or worked out with the ex-wife through mutual agreement. One of these 16, however, had physical custody of one of his children, while his ex-wife had physical custody of the other. In such noncustodial situations, the children's mother typically has full decision-making authority with respect to the daily management of the children's lives.

Of the remaining four fathers in this study, two reported that they had joint legal custody of their children. In these cases, the fathers do not have physical custody of their children but do have legal decision-making authority. Thus, the fathers with joint legal custody are similar to the majority of the fathers in this study in that they maintain a visiting relationship with their children. They may, however, have enhanced involvement in their children's lives because of their legally recognized decision-making ability. The remaining two fathers described their custodial arrangement as joint physical custody — namely, the children essentially split their time between their parents.

It is important to note, of course, that custodial status can change over time. In fact, the custodial status of two of the fathers changed in the time period between the first
and second interviews; two noncustodial fathers gained custody of their children over that three year period. Moreover, families often make informal custodial adjustments as well. The distribution of types of custodial status found in this sample at the time of the initial interviews is depicted in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2

CUSTODIAL STATUS AT TIME OF FIRST INTERVIEW
Postdivorce Relationships With Children

The nature of the relationship that divorced fathers maintain with their children in these varying custodial circumstances has drawn considerable research attention. In this study, I consider postdivorce father-child relationships from a variety of perspectives. In particular, these fathers gave detailed accounts of the transitions that divorce prompted in their relationships with their children. Their narratives focused on (a) the frequency with which they see their children; (b) the challenges that they face as they parent within the confines of a visitation schedule; (c) the satisfaction that they feel with respect to the quality of their relationship with their children; and (d) the influence that they perceive themselves to have in their children's lives.

With respect to frequency of contact, twelve of the fathers participating in this study reported visiting their children every other weekend. In addition, several of these fathers also were allotted one additional day of visitation in the week between their weekend visits. Of the remaining eight research participants, five maintained only infrequent postdivorce contacts with their children, and three maintained a level of contact that substantially exceeded the typical "every other weekend" visitation schedule. One father, in particular, provided information about the ample contact he had with his children: "I see them six days a week. I flat out got them five days a week and they spend overnight with their mother probably three days a week, two to three days a week depending."

Viewed as a group, the men in this sample therefore run the gamut in terms of frequency of contact, with the bulk falling in the middle category, as illustrated in Figure 68.
4.3. Notably, the amount of contact that the fathers in this study have reported that they maintain with their children after divorce is substantially higher than the level of contact reflected in nationally representative samples.

Figure 4.3

FREQUENCY OF CONTACT BETWEEN FATHERS AND CHILDREN
In their discussions of the challenges that they face in effecting continued contact with their children, roughly half of the fathers reported that visitation runs relatively smoothly. For example, one father who maintained frequent contact with his children after divorce depicted an amicable arrangement. Although his formal visitation agreement authorized visitation only every other weekend, this participant said that "if I let her know when I want to have the kids and she has nothing going on, she lets me have the kids." He also reported that "on the weekends I don't have them I usually get them all day one of the week days. I'll have them at least once or twice during the week." Likewise, another father had initially recounted the strain he experienced from driving approximately 30 miles (each way) for his scheduled visitation, but by the time he was interviewed, again he and his ex-wife had worked out a new agreement in which they divided driving time more equitably:

We just now got the new agreement structured to where [my ex-wife] does drive one way which sounds so stupid, but that's a major change. We can actually now eat dinner on Sunday night together instead of eating at a fast food restaurant in Worthington trying to get her back by 6:00. I mean we can actually sit down at a table and eat dinner and not be hyper, or fighting, or struggling, or hurrying down [Route] 23 to get her home.

At the same time, six of the fathers in this sample reported substantial problems in coordinating and negotiating their visitation. For example, one father described the start of one of his visitation weekends in this way:

I went to the door to pick up the children and my ex-wife asked me to come in, there was something she wanted to discuss . . . . My daughters were there . . . . My wife sits down with a legal pad. She said there's some things we want to discuss with you . . . . In essence, [I was going to have to] sit there and let her tell me what I was going to do, then I could have the children . . . . We went through two or three things and I cannot remember what the topic was but there was
something I didn't agree with. And I said, "No, you're crazy . . . this is the way I feel" . . . . She became upset with me and I don't know what happened, but anyhow the next thing is she walked over and hit me . . . . And she stated that I wasn't getting the kids and all this and she started screaming for the girls to call the police. So at that I walked out the door, of course without the kids, got in my car and left.

Other fathers' narratives may not be this vivid, but they did describe a variety of situations in which there was conflict with ex-wives over controlling visitation. One father, for example, said "I feel like she's the gatekeeper and I think she relishes that role," and another father reported that "I know my ex has -- she has brainwashed them. She's got them dead set against me. And there's nothing I can do." And yet another father described his situation as one in which "if it benefits [my ex-wife] it's fine, but if its for me, it don't work that way."

Turning to the third focus of these fathers' narratives pertaining to their postdivorce parenting -- their subjective experience of satisfaction with their relationships with their children -- 16 of the fathers in this study characterized their relationships with their children as close and fulfilling. For example, when asked how his relationship was going with his children, one father replied, "It's great. We get along real good. We don't have no problems." In response to the same question, another participant responded, "It's perfect. It's as good as it can be." In describing his relationship with his six-year-old daughter, a different interviewee explained:

We have a great rapport. I go pick her up on Friday nights and she's tearing out of her mother's arms to run out to the car. I always get out and wave, [like a] bubble gum commercial where she runs out [and we're] in each other's arms . . . . And last year, she really started to run!
Interestingly, such positive depictions often came from fathers who had reported experiencing significant conflict in negotiating visitation schedules and guidelines. Generally, neither limited frequency of contact nor conflict over visitation were good predictors of, or even strongly correlated with, these fathers' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their children.

Although they are a minority, it is also important to give voice to those respondents who felt that their postdivorce relationships with their children had significantly deteriorated. Four fathers in this sample depicted the transitions that divorce prompted in their relationships with their children very negatively. For instance, one father felt that truly parenting his children had become close to impossible since the divorce. When asked what he represented in his daughters lives, this man responded:

A good time. I'm somebody to do something with if they want to come. That's all I am . . . . I want to parent, but I can't . . . . Here I am a divorced father, two fantastic, great children. They are supposed to come with me every two weeks. Now, if they come over here and I make it uncomfortable to be here because of "parenting" . . . how receptive or how open do you think [they will] be in coming the next weekend . . . . It's an option -- if you don't want to go you don't have to go. You can stay home.

Another father portrayed the loss of a close relationship with his sons in this way:

I've become very attached to my girlfriend's son. And I almost feel so separated from my own sons that when they come here to visit on weekends it's just a different feeling . . . . It's not one of those feelings that I despise to see them come because I love them and I want them to come, but I don't think we're all that close.

Regardless of their relative perceptions of emotional closeness to their children, the majority sensed that they no longer had a substantial influence over their children's lives.

Over half of the fathers in this sample expressed sentiments that mirrored the reflections of
this father: "I mean let's face it -- it's set up -- she's the custodial parent, she makes all the
decisions for the kids." Although one father, in particular, talked at length about the
strong relationship he had forged with his daughter, he nevertheless also claimed:

I have absolutely no say in [Jane's] life as far as religion, health care, day care.
Her mother makes sure of that. Well, at this point I don't even know who her
babysitter is and she won't tell me. What I would like to see is us being on
equal grounds. Her mother makes all the decisions.

In a similar vein, another father felt frustrated by his peripheral involvement in guiding his
children's lives:

I'm not involved in any part of the decision-making of their life. This is something
that I think is a major, major factor. . . . her mother, the custodial parent, has the
total control . . . . So the only thing I end up being is "Sugar Daddy." I can come
over and have fun, but as far as me having responsibility, I'm nothing. I'm a
complete zip.

Postdivorce Relationships with Ex-Wives

Implicit in these narratives concerning fathers' postdivorce relationships with their
children are feelings of contempt for the control that they perceive their ex-wives to have
in shaping those relationships. Indeed, when talking about their children, fathers often
made reference to their ex-wives' increasing power and intrusiveness. One father
articulated his feelings in this way:

She tells me that I no longer have a say in anything. . . . She tells me it's none of
my business. She don't have to answer to me is what she says. . . . I just keep my
mouth shut and I do what I got to do on the weekends and it's easier to do that
than it is to go up there and argue with her all the time.

The comments of another research participant provide a second illustration of the
pervasive sense of frustration and futility fathers often feel when attempting to influence
their children's lives:
I would like to say that I'm sure that she has done a complete number on me with the children — I don't know. I have no proof of it. But I think the children know totally and completely that mom is in control . . . . I mean, let's face it, it's set up. She's the custodial parent, she makes all the decisions for the kids.

These fathers' tendency to express resentment for their ex-wives' control over their children's lives was exacerbated by their negative views of their ex-wives' mothering skills. In fact, when asked how they would characterize their ex-wives as parents, 16 of the fathers in this sample articulated a variety of rather scathing opinions, ranging from concerns about mental stability to views about self-indulgence and poor money management. For example, one father expressed considerable apprehension with respect to his ex-wives' emotional state:

She's not stable at all . . . . I know that [the children] don't seem to have any stability as far as home life goes . . . . Lack of a home life, lack of a bedtime or lunch time, that sort of thing . . . . She's always talking about moving out of state and just running away somewhere. I worry about that a lot. I worry about how that will affect the kids. How her moods affect the kids, that sort of thing.

In the same vein, with regard to the ability of their ex-wives to put the needs of their children before their own needs, several fathers voiced the concern that their ex-wives were relatively self-absorbed:

In a nutshell, I think she pays more attention to herself that she pays to them. Because she always dresses nicely, and I worry about the kids not being dressed nice. I mean, they've shown up in what I would consider just raggedy clothes . . . . I'm all the time becoming upset when they show up in shorts and it's a cool weekend . . . .

Another man criticized his ex-wife for not spending enough time with her children:

[I said to my ex-wife], "during the weekends, if you want to spend that time with your kids, do it. Do it. Spend time with the kids." Instead, she's got this guy that she's seeing and as a result what's happening is -- I think she feels guilty because
she doesn't have the time. And I don't know how many guys you've heard this from, but probably she feels guilty because she doesn't have or give the time.

Moreover, about a third of the fathers in this sample specifically criticized their ex-wives for being poor and irresponsible money managers. These men often expressed a sense of outrage and frustration with their ex-wives' lack of accountability for financial matters. For example, in a depiction of this ex-wife that illustrates the sentiments expressed by a variety of respondents, one participant commented:

She's always been a terrible money manager. One of the things I would implore the courts to do in all cases, not just in our case, in all cases, is to somehow regulate the child support in what it is used for . . . . You know, and the flip side of that is I have no problem at all, no problem at all helping out in any way that I can, and I've told her "if you come to me in a spirit of cooperativeness, I'll give you whatever I have. No problem." The problem I have is . . . she's always been a poor money manager and so things that she know are coming up she doesn't set . . . aside for.

What is perhaps most notable about the research participants' narratives, however, is how little they actually talked about their ex-wives. They, of course, responded to direct questions about the conflict they experience, as well as how they would characterize their ex-wives as mothers. Nevertheless, relative to the time these men spent detailing other pressing concerns, they talked remarkably little about their ex-wives.

This tendency appears to mirror men's more general tendency to talk with their ex-wives as little as possible. In fact, nearly 75% of the men in this study reported that, by conscious decision, they have extremely limited contact with their children's mothers. Interestingly, these men consciously limiting contact with their ex-wives divided almost evenly in terms of how they characterized their relationship. Indeed, about half of these men reported experiencing substantial conflict with their ex-wives, but the other half
described relatively stable, cooperative relationships. Thus, the conflictual or cooperative nature of the relationship does not seem to predict the extent to which these divorced fathers avoid contact with their ex-wives.

Negotiating the Legal and Mental Health Institutions Surrounding Divorce

Feminist theory suggests the importance of focusing theoretical attention on social structure as well as individual experience, placing family experiences within their historical and political contexts (Thompson & Walker, 1995). Thus, research is beginning to explore the relationship between men's perceived inequities in the legal system and their postdivorce relationships with their children, pointing to the need to cast the challenges of fathering after divorce in its broader social order (Arditti & Allen, 1993; Fox & Blanton, 1995). The fathers' narratives in this study point to the vitality of such an approach, and concentrate on two interrelated discursive themes -- financial issues and concerns with the legal system.

Financial Issues

With respect to the financial changes prompted by divorce, the participants in this study talked at length about issues related to the system of child support. Every one of these 20 fathers reported that he paid child support on a regular basis. For instance, when one interviewee was asked if there had ever been any problems with his payment of child support, he responded, "Never been late, never miss a payment." Indeed, the majority of fathers portrayed their system of paying child support as methodical and routine. In one case, a father commented that "[my child support] comes out of my check and
automatically goes to where its supposed to go. I never even see it." Another father
described his ritual of paying child support in more detail:

Every other Friday I go down to the credit union, 10:00 in the morning, and get a
money order and send checks, take time off work, get a money order, fill it out,
write a memo to the court clerk about the money enclosed -- $600 money
order . . . . Send it out like clock work in the mail. If I'm going to get my kids
that weekend . . . I wait and mail it when I get near the kids' home so it should get
to the court on time. It's always on time.

When prompted to talk about particular challenges and problems posed by their
child support obligations, four fathers in this sample did mention occasional problems with
the prompt and standard payment of child support. Each of them, to varying degrees,
placed the responsibility for these problems with the child support enforcement system.

Two of these four angrily viewed the system as primarily at fault for their
predicament. One of these father's accounts illustrates the anger that men often direct at
"the system":

. . . before it was taken out of my pay check, I went up and I paid it on time every
time. I have every receipt. I can prove -- which I know I don't need to -- but I can
prove it. When I was working for . . . another financial institution, I all of a
sudden started receiving checks every month, every two weeks, back from child
support . . . . What in the heck are you sending me money back for? Well, your
institution is miscalculating your child support and they are paying us too much
every month . . . . We go down the road two years . . . and this continues and
continues [until] all of the sudden I'm hit with . . . I got notification that I was . . .
being nailed by the IRS because I'm in arrears.

Another father disagreed strenuously with the procedures used to calculate his child
support contribution:

I talked to a caseworker one time, and that's the time that she said you're behind in
your child support. We're going to have to add so much so you can start making it
up . . . . They're the one's that are court ordered that I pay my fair share of child
support based upon my income. They are not basing it on my income. They are
basing it on my income plus a loan from this company . . . . [It's] not realistically based on my income. It's based on the money I show in a paycheck, okay, but some of that money is -- if certain things don't happen I have to pay that money back [to my employer] . . . . And that's what I object to . . . . What I'm objecting to here is they've got this based on $2000 a month as my income, when in essence that is not my income.

While these two fathers attributed their child support problems to the inadequacies of the enforcement system, the other two fathers reported only intermittent problems with maintaining their contributions to their children's support. Their focus was on the financial problems that created their inability to meet their obligations. At the same time, they did attribute some responsibility to the child support award and enforcement systems. For example, one father reported:

Now see, I got off to a bad start. There was nothing I could do unless I borrowed the money -- borrowing from Peter to pay Paul so to speak. That's how the courts really set me up for that. They didn't take into consideration that I was spending all my money on her bills. All of it . . . . That's the way it was and sometime in the middle of November they started taking child support out of my [pay]check, but at the end of November I still owed for October's bills and I was still required by the court to pay those bills.

Another participant reported that he had paid child support regularly for eight years until he lost his job. His indignation is evidenced by the following comments:

I was paying about $800 a month, and I've been doing that for seven or eight years now . . . . The money stopped coming in -- and you know I am unemployed . . . . The bottom line is the whole system again . . . . And I probably won't end up going to court. I've got to get something worked out. Right now I'm being stubborn. They've got me irritated. We're talking about a contempt of court charge because I failed to pick up the telephone to tell them something they already knew.

In general, this study's narratives are replete with accounts of the financial strain that fathers have experienced as a result of divorce. Nearly half of the study's respondents
talked specifically about the economic hardships they have endured. For instance, one father reported working two jobs just to meet his child support obligations and characterized his financial situation, as well as its effect on his relationships with his children, as "devastated:"

I work 40 hours a week and [after paying child support] I bring home $41 a week . . . . I got my house payment and my truck payment. Then the bills after that -- I've had to borrow money off my mom and dad just to pay my electric bill and that kind of stuff . . . . On the weekends I can't even afford to see my boys . . . . I'm to the point where I can't even afford [the gas money that I would need] to take them home, so I don't even get to see them. See, I haven't seen the boys for two months . . . . The main thing is -- regardless of who is paying support, you know, if I was paying or she was paying, there's got to be enough money left over for that noncustodial parent to do things with the kids.

Another father related his financial strain to what he perceived as his ex-wife's continued economic dependence on him:

And the financial burden has been enormous because that's what [my ex-wife] has been able to structure, what the court has structured with the new support guidelines . . . . [My ex-wife] makes no money . . . . she has not gone back into the work force. When she was in the work force, she made more money than I made. But because she hasn't been in the work force, she doesn't make that now. In fact they computed it in the child support guidelines to show her having zero . . . . income . . . . I mean I do understand to a degree because in essence the court is saying . . . . if we had a violin we'd play it for you, but we don't, and what we're really concerned about here is your child's welfare, and why should your child suffer at all at no fault of her own because your ex-wife [isn't working] . . . . [Jane] is 14 going on 15 . . . . and even though she's school aged, they still can't force her to work.

In the same vein, one participant felt burdened by all of his financial responsibilities and expressed frustration with both his ex-wife and the legal system for creating his economic hardship:

My first ex-wife used to [make]$17-18 an hour. Well, I think it was last year they closed the doors and they went bankrupt. They permanently laid everybody off or
whatever, did away with their jobs. The Child Support Bureau was where we went first. They asked her what her income was and she said I don't have an income. Well, why don't you have an income? Well, I lost my job. Well, okay, do you plan on getting another job? She says, no, I won't work for minimum wage. So in the meantime, they raised my support to make up the difference for her.

Embedded within these fathers' narrative accounts of their financial circumstances were two additional concerns. First, several men in this study voiced concerns about issues of fairness with respect to calculating child support awards, and, in particular, expressed a desire to have child support reduced to reflect the number of days that they spent visiting their children. In fact, one father went to court to request a child support credit during his summer visitation:

I was to get my kids two weeks of the summer and I went to the judge and said if I have them for those two weeks, I shouldn't have to pay child support. The judge said that he doesn't usually grant such requests, but in my case I would only have to pay half my child support.

Second, a clear majority of these fathers made express reference to ongoing concerns about the ways in which their child support money was being used. In particular, the views of one father about accountability for the ways in which his child support funds were being spent mirror those expressed by a majority of participants in this study. Indeed, this father speaks not only about his own feelings, but speculated about the attitudes of other divorced fathers as well:

I would like to go to court and have [my ex-wife] account for [the child support]. I'm pretty sure they wouldn't do that but I would like to see that [at least] half the money goes for my son. Here I'm paying this child support and mom's using the money for God knows what. I think a lot of fathers would be much happier paying child support [if] they could know that if they wanted, they could get a record of where that money went. I think the frustration of many of the fathers I speak to is that we are expected to pay and we're not allowed to
question, we're not allowed to ask. As far as they're concerned, you have no right. I have been told you have no right [to find out about] how I spend this money.

Taking this accountability notion further, one of these fathers expressed the view that his provision of financial support should be accompanied by input in the decision-making process. When talking about medical bills, for example, this father said, "I don't mind paying it . . . I pay all the bills but I have no say in who the doctor is or where she goes."

The Legal System

Perhaps the most common sentiment expressed by the fathers in this study was their perceived mistreatment at the hands of the legal system. In fact, all but one of the study's participants enumerated countless ways in which they felt that they had been treated unfairly in a legal system that they believed to be biased toward women. This commonly held view was succinctly expressed by one father: "The woman gets the elevator, the man gets the shaft."

One context within which men characterized their unfair treatment at the hands of the legal system is in discussions about the court's involvement in shaping property settlements. For example, one participant described his financial situation as uncomplicated and blamed the courts not only for countless delays, but also for failing to communicate vital information to him. This father, who believed that his was a rather unique divorce experience, articulated his feelings in this way:

Many things happened that I thought were somewhat unusual with my divorce. I lay blame on the legal system of Marion County . . . . I feel that I was taken advantage of because of the situation. I feel the legal system was unfair . . . . I had a lot of anger. I have a lot of distrust in the legal system. I mean, I don't know, it just wasn't fair . . . . I felt the courts let me down . . . . I felt the whole situation was a joke.
Another father described his experience with a judge who apparently had expressed his reluctance to hear this case. According to this participant, the judge may have been trying to encourage the divorcing couple -- along with their attorneys -- to work out their own settlement rather than bringing their disputes into court. Although this father reported that he understood the judges' perspective to some extent, he nevertheless expressed strong feelings about the way in which his situation was handled:

Then you sit there and say, well what am I into here . . . . So you wonder what you're dealing with in that type of situation. And that's what happened to me. [I was] angry; scared; nervous; really, really angry. And angry to the point that I felt that the judicial system, I have lost faith in the judicial system. I just don't have it anymore. I don't trust the courts. Can't trust the judges. Can't stand the attorneys . . . . The system the way it exists is not good. It's very substandard. I think they have very substandard people sitting on the benches . . . . The system would have taken six bites out of me, chewed it up and spit it out.

Indeed, these concerns with the basic fairness of the legal system ran so deep for one father that he decided to have as limited involvement with the legal system as possible:

I really truly believe that -- somebody's going to win, somebody's going to lose when you go to a legal system and put it in the hands of two attorneys . . . . A man can't win. He cannot win. I'm convinced of that after seeing these other situations. That's why I as kind of lucky that I had seen these people and the road they went down.

A second context within which men frame their negative attitudes about the legal system is found in issues involving the negotiation of custody. In fact, 14 of the 20 fathers in this study reported that they were expressly advised by their attorneys -- or, in a few cases, by other professionals in the judicial system -- not to fight for custody of their children. For example, one father reflected on his lawyer's advice in this way:
I had two lawyers and they basically say unless she's an unfit mother you're not going to get custody. They didn't lie to me. She's not unfit. But that doesn't mean that I can't do a better job than she can.

Likewise, another father was advised not to pursue custody of his children after divorce.

He, too, expressed resentment toward a legal system that he perceived as biased:

[My lawyer] said I didn't have a leg to stand on, and that I would have to prove her unfit . . . . In all aspects maybe the court has made a mistake in my case because I would spend more time with my kids. I would have more quality time with my kids. [Jane] is the mother. I think the court looks at it as you are the mother and this is how it has gone for so many years and this is the way it's going to be.

Moreover, these men perceived the legal system to be hostile toward their desires to negotiate joint custody/shared parenting plans. In their narratives, fathers frequently depicted the legal system's bias to include an inappropriate assumption that men cannot, and should not, be fully involved in parenting their children after divorce. This view led several men to express a sense of resignation about what they could achieve within the confines of a biased legal system. For example, one father described his attempts at putting a shared parenting plan into effect in this way:

Before the divorce was finalized, I spoke with my attorney about a shared parenting or joint custody agreement, at which point he told me that it really wasn't feasible. It was only a state of mind. It was never pursued. I subsequently, weeks after the divorce, assembled my first shared parenting proposal and immediately got involved . . . . I'm finally to the point where ...[I am] ready to put together the third shared parenting proposal.

This depiction opened up a dialogue in which the interviewer probed further, asking this father what he would do if his shared parenting plan were denied a third time. He responded:
Expect it. Fathers expect it. There are judges out there that it's the automatic response. Children accept it because "that's what Timmy's got. He sees his dad every other week." And half my [daughter's] class sees their fathers every other week.

In a similar vein, when asked if he would consider petitioning the court for shared parenting so that he could share responsibility for making decisions about his children's lives, another father expressed his sense of pessimism and responded, "not really. I truthfully have no confidence in the court -- none whatsoever. The court has taught me that it is a joke."

Although a minority, it is also notable that five fathers in this sample extended their negative feelings about the legal system surrounding divorce to include the mental health institutions with which they came into contact. Specifically, two of these five fathers criticized children's services departments for failing to take their concerns and views seriously, and, more broadly, interpreted the behaviors of children's services personnel as evidence of their biases against fathers. One father, for example, was concerned about what he believed to be an abusive environment in the home of his ex-wife and her boyfriend, complaining that:

Children's Services won't do nothing for a father. Like I can call and they won't investigate it, but I can have a [woman] friend call and they'll investigate it. I think they look at it as like, how can I phrase that, like I'm bitter that the kids don't live with me or something and I'm just trying -- I think they think that I'm more or less lying but I'm not.

Moreover, three of the five fathers described family counselors in a similar manner. In other words, these participants believed that the counselors that they looked to for help,
in reality, acted more as advocates for the ex-wives. For example, one father described his counseling sessions as follows:

Well, it was very one sided. I was wondering why this marriage counselor seemed to be defending [Jane] an awful lot. "Poor little [Jane]." . . . I was wondering why she was so wishy-washy about things. I was telling her about [Jane’s] behavior, this thing and that thing, and she’d say well this could be that or that could be this -- wishy-washy answers. Until finally she said I’m here to defend [Jane]. If I had to choose between the two of you, I’d choose [Jane].

Another father felt very disconnected from his children at the time of the divorce and requested family counseling, in part, to remedy that situation. He chronicled his futile efforts to arrange family counseling sessions in this way:

I wanted to be able to talk with my children openly and honestly . . . . I thought they somehow they needed to know that their dad wasn’t a bad person. That he didn’t do anything terrible, and that he certainly loved them as much as anything in the world . . . . The judge did order family counseling . . . . To the best of my knowledge my children never went. And on the third time that I went I asked the counselor, I said, when are we going to get together with the children and my ex-wife or whatever you think is necessary? She said . . . this is counseling for you. This is to help you deal with the divorce. And I said, no it's not. This is to help me and my children deal with the divorce. And she said, well that's not my understanding. And I said, your understanding from who? And that's when she stated that in a discussion with my ex-wife that [she came to believe that] I was the one that needed the help . . . . [I was told that] there's no way we can force [the children] in here [for counseling]. So at that point it was all dropped, forgotten about and that was the end of counseling.

In conclusion, as this review of narrative themes has illustrated, the accounts of the participants in this study include depictions bearing on many of the central issues identified by divorce researchers. For example, the fathers participating in this study felt mistreated by what they perceived as a biased legal system, a finding consistent with the results of Arditti and Allen’s (1993) research indicating that fathers often perceive legal and relational inequities in the divorce process, child custody, visitation, and child support.
Likewise, the anger and frustration about loss of authority and influence expressed by a majority of fathers in this study finds reflection in the existing research (Arendell, 1992, 1995; Bertoia & Drakich, 1993; Coltrane & Hickman, 1992; Emery et al., 1991; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Mandell, 1995; Umberson & Williams, 1995). More generally, themes revolving around issues of equity, influence, and authority are dominant in this study. These same themes are at the center of theories of gender relations of power in families (Ferree, 1990; Thorne, 1992), and yet are only peripherally featured in the extant research on divorce. Thus, the narratives of the fathers in this study provide an excellent foundation from which to begin to take up larger questions about the connections between divorce, fatherhood, and the social construction of gender. The next chapter turns to this task.
CHAPTER 5

DIVORCE: A CRISIS IN GENDER RELATIONS

Theoretical Perspectives on Gender in Marriage

A variety of suggestions in the existing research point to the utility of a theoretical grounding that can discern and explore the shifts in gender relations prompted by divorce (Arditti & Allen, 1993; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Mandell, 1995). But with a few notable exceptions (Arendell, 1995, Reissman, 1990), extant research has been characterized by a lack of detailed attention to gender. To begin to fill this gap, this study has adopted a theoretical underpinning that focuses attention on the dynamic nature of gender relations in families. Indeed, while, from the outset, I centered my study on gender, the research participants' narrative accounts brought me even more forcefully to such a gender perspective since they consistently brought gender to the fore as a central theme in their descriptions and interpretations.

To fully understand the meaning of divorce in fathers' lives, it is important to place their experiences within the larger social context. Life events occur within a social milieu that, to a large extent, structures the family roles of men and women in particular ways, and patterns the personal and social meaning attached to those roles. Moreover, large
scale social processes often shape the opportunities and constraints that fathers experience as they attempt to enact specific roles. Thus, it is important to view fathers' experiences in their postdivorce families as both socially patterned and individualistic in nature (Marsiglio, 1995a). In this analysis, therefore, men's interpretations can be arrayed along a set of common dimensions, with shades of variation around these common understandings. My emphasis in this chapter is on these commonalities, as well as on the strong cultural imperatives that guide the ways in which these fathers' experiences are shaped by gender ideology and identity. Before turning to this analysis, however, I now present two central theoretical tenets that provide a backdrop for understanding this study's findings.

First, in this study I treat gender -- and, in particular, notions of masculinity -- not as normative referents, but as complex and problematic constructs (Levant & Pollack, 1995). That is, I treat masculinity as a topic for critical investigation. In doing so, I attempt to link an understanding of men's creation and maintenance of their gendered selves with an understanding of the ways in which gender influences power relations and perpetuates inequalities (Coltrane, 1994). This approach has the potential to contribute to a feminist analysis of social power arrangements.

Second, I view gender, race, class, and sexuality as interconnected systems of stratification. In this view, gender is merely one link in an interlocking structure, and the interlocking nature of these systems, rather than any particular system, becomes the unit of analysis (Collins, 1990). Thus, gender relations of power in families are best understood as systematically related to power hierarchies such as race, class, and sexuality.
Fathers' stories serve as an excellent platform from which to elucidate generalizable patterns of gender relations in families. Divorce prompts a crisis in gender relations for men. From a gender-focused viewpoint, men occupy positions of relative privilege, and divorce calls this status into question. In particular, the reorganization of financial and parenting roles following divorce can precipitate changes in fathers' prerogatives in the family. Thus, the divorce process, and the legal systems that it invokes, redistributes power and may well lead to a postdivorce family structure in which men's perceived relative position is dramatically altered.

Marriage As A Gendered Institution

Over the last two decades, feminist scholars have highlighted the gendered nature of the institution of marriage. Marriage is depicted in this way, not merely because men and women participate in it, but because its gendered-structured social organization, in turn, shapes power relations between husbands and wives (Ferree, 1990; Thorne, 1992). Gender structured divisions of labor often are rationalized and perpetuated because family members construct explanations using taken-for-granted definitions of what it means to be a man as opposed to a woman, as well as ideologies about contemporary marriage and gender relations within it (Thompson, 1991). In other words, family members employ gender strategies -- solving the problem at hand in light of the cultural notions of gender at play (Hochschild, 1989).

A prevailing cultural norm that repeatedly found expression in the narratives of these study participants is that of marital equality. In modern American society, portraying marriage as a union of co-equal companions is increasingly viewed as a societal
ideal (Coltrane, 1996; Riessman, 1990). The fathers in this study sought to attain this socially-acceptable status of at least surface equality. Yet at the same time, men in general, and the fathers in this study in particular, are reluctant to give up the privileged position of relative inequality that is associated with conventional marital norms (Goode, 1982). Under such a marital structure, men bear relatively less of the burdens associated with family work.

These two conflicting influences create an obvious tension that plays itself out in these fathers' constructions of their identities both within and outside of marriage. But while these strategies may be effective in marriage, the crisis in gender relations that men experience at the point of divorce may render them irrelevant in this altered family context. Nonetheless, in order to gain a fuller appreciation of the gender transition effected through divorce, it is important to attempt to understand more fully the starting point -- namely, fathers methods of negotiating the equality dilemma in marriage. The fathers in this study exhibit two distinct methods of doing so.

First, these fathers appear to have erected a fictionalized, or at least an internally inconsistent, account of their marital role. For example, one father characterized his relationship with his children as "very close," and talked about his involvement in their daily lives in this way:

I was the first one home after work... I was involved with their whole lives... I was the one who always took them to the park. I played catch with [John], rode bikes. I was the one who took walks and stuff.

But later in his account of his failed marriage, this father explained:
She had an affair. Because I wasn't home. I was in maintenance work six days a week. I was on second shift, nobody ever saw me. I felt alone. Even when the family was there, I felt alone. Because, you know, I'd see her an hour in the morning. I'd watch her sleep on the couch when I got home from work. I seen the kids off to school in the morning and I didn't see them until the following morning and then on the weekends.

Clearly, there are contradictions in this father's recollections. Likewise, when another father was asked to describe his personal and caregiving relationship with his children, he responded:

Well, we've been close from day one. I mean, hunt, fish, work on cars. You name it, it don't make any difference what we did, we done this as one more than two. . . . We was almost inseparable. I think we were [so close] maybe because we were together so much.

As his story unfolded, however, this same father also recalled:

But there was a period of three years that I worked three jobs, so I wasn't really home much. But when I was home I was with her instead of the rest of them more or less. She was always tagging along with me somewhere.

Thus, like many of the fathers in this study, both of these fathers have erected internally inconsistent accounts of their marital role. On the one hand, they recount highly involved relationships with, and intense emotional attachments to, their children. Yet on the other hand, they report that their work schedules largely removed them family life.

These inconsistent accounts are, in essence, these fathers' strategies for coping with the inherent gender-based tensions that they experience in their marital lives. While this type of coping strategy may prove effective in marriage, divorce likely compromises the extent to which fathers' actually benefit from such self-constructions.

Second, the fathers in this study strove to depict themselves as measuring up to the egalitarian marriage ideal by adopting gendered conceptualizations of what constitutes
family work. Existing research indicates that, in many cases, fathers engage primarily in play with their children rather than taking responsibility for routine daily care (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1989). The fathers in this study repeatedly took such an approach; for example, when asked to characterize his relationship with his daughter, one father responded:

I think a good one. We did lots of things together. Sometimes all three of us. Lots of times when I got home because my wife did not work... she was pretty pooped and so [Jane] and I would play on the swing sets or ride bikes or take walks, play games. Sometimes eat dinner together. I mean we generally ate dinner together but sometimes we'd go on special trips -- ride down to Dairy Queen, and stuff like that.

This father's emphasis on his role engaging in play with his daughter is mirrored in other fathers' highly gendered ideas about what constitutes family work. For example, one man characterized the division of labor in his married family as "at least 50/50 if not more."

When the interviewer probed further, he explained by saying:

I mean it might have been 60/40, because I wasn't here all the time. I tried to do what I could. I tried to do a lot of things there to make it a little easier on her. Bought her a dishwasher and things like that. Try to make her job a little easier.

In the same vein, another participant, when asked if he thought that he and his wife split household chores equally, replied:

Oh yeh. As far as cleaning the house, as far as maintaining the house, I did all the maintaining. I mean like putting up new gutters. I didn't do the roof but we had the roof re-done; put in a skylight in the kitchen; put new tile in the kitchen; new carpeting throughout... I kept the yard nice and clean. Planted flowers -- I worked on pulling these big shrubs out so we could plant the flowers in the flower bed. I always mowed the yard. [My wife] did the yard occasionally.

These respondents may construct these contributions as constituting a 50/50 division of labor, but in reality they fall into highly gendered categories. Existing research indicates that the family work that most women do is unrelenting, repetitive, and routine (i.e.,

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laundry, cooking, cleaning, responsibility for children's schedules). These household tasks generally must be repeated the next day or sooner. In contrast, the family work that most men do is infrequent, irregular, and non-routine (i.e., yard work; household repairs; gardening; taking out the trash) (Berk, 1985). Feminist scholarship points out that failure to distinguish between routine household tasks and occasional or seasonal tasks is a strategy that men sometimes use to rationalize inequitable gender arrangements in families (Hochschild, 1989; Thompson & Walker, 1989). As underscored by Hochschild's (1989) and Komter's (1989) research, a similar strategy that men use to minimize or avoid household work is to wait to be asked, hoping that they won't be. The account of one father in this study illustrates this precise approach:

I can let the bathroom go for three weeks before we cleaned it and after a week and a half, my wife would have to clean it because she couldn't stand it. So her cleaning concepts were different than mine. Therefore, she cleaned more because she felt like it was dirty and wanted to clean it. But then I took out the garbage and mowed the lawn, so . . . .

This strategy is perhaps most effective when it convincingly translates a husband's resistance into merely a difference of opinion (Thompson, 1991).

As these examples illustrate, on the surface, fathers in this study present themselves as committed to the modern ideal of egalitarian marriage. Yet a critical investigation of their narrative accounts uncovers the gender strategies embedded within these depictions. These strategies allow men to uphold egalitarian marriage ideology without actually evenly distributing domestic tasks. To further understand the strength of men's sense of privilege and entitlement in their families, I now turn to an analysis of the crisis in gender relations that divorce prompts.
Gender Relations of Power in Divorce

Feminist theories problematize gender in families, and recast the family as a system of gender stratification that is situated within the context of a patriarchal social structure (Ferree, 1990; Thorne, 1992; Zinn, 1990). Inequities in the larger society influence the differential access to resources and rewards for men and women in families (Allen & Baber, 1994; Chafetz, 1988). Moreover, gender is not necessarily synonymous with male domination and the devaluation of women; gender dominance also can involve the subordination of some groups of men (Connell, 1987). Thus, to fully understand the experience of divorce for fathers in this culture, this study links men's personal and private experiences with the social and public issues of divorce.

By elevating gender and treating it as a central analytic concept, feminist theoretical perspectives provide a framework within which to assess the transitions that divorce prompts in gender roles, identities, and ideologies in these fathers' lives. Utilizing this framework provides insights into the principal findings derived from these research data. Gender theory focuses on the shift in gender relations of power and authority related to the multiple transitions of divorce. Such changes include not only actual adjustments made, but perhaps more importantly, perceived losses. Understood in this way, divorce represents a "crisis tendency" for men in families because it weakens the institutional foundation that sustains the legitimacy of their power (Connell, 1987). Moreover, because systems of gender power are, to a large extent, maintained by the connection of authority with masculinity (Connell, 1995), divorce also can be
conceptualized as a central influence on men's constructions of masculinity, as they respond to changing relations of gender power.

From the perspective of the fathers participating in this study, the legal and relational changes prompted by divorce signified a loss of the access and the authority to which many of the participants felt entitled. In particular, these fathers detailed their sense of victimization in divorce, with discussions that centered on two interrelated themes: perceived loss of power and status within their families and a concomitant loss of status within a gender-structured society.

**Fathers' Positions Within Their Families**

One of the primary themes in the research participants' narrative accounts was a rhetoric of entitlement with respect to the authority and power associated with their predivorce family role. The divorce had changed, these fathers recounted, the nature of the relationships with their children, as well as with their ex-wives. In particular, a substantial majority of the fathers in this sample reported a sense of loss with respect to their authority and influence in their children's lives. Interestingly, as noted earlier, a clear majority of the fathers in this study did not report feeling a sense of loss with respect to the quality of their relationship with their children after divorce, even though they reported a significant decline in their frequency of contact with their children. Yet these fathers experienced and described a palpable sense of diminishment in their authority, especially vis-a-vis their ex-wives. Indeed, they most often described their new family position with reference to power struggles with their ex-wives, and noted with great frequency the increasingly powerful and influential roles that, as a result of divorce, their ex-wives
played in their children's lives. In essence, these fathers experience the postdivorce realignment of family power as a zero-sum game, in which their ex-wives gain authority and power at their expense.

These findings suggest not only that the subjective experience of the fathers in this study included prominent feelings that they were marginalized within their families, but also that the divorce transition impinges upon settled feelings of entitlement. This discourse of loss and entitlement is evidenced in three primary topics embedded within these father's narratives: (a) visitation rights; (b) parental authority; and (c) loss of financial control.

**Visitation rights.** As discussed previously, approximately half of the fathers in this study reported that the child visits themselves run smoothly, but a substantial number of fathers described problems in coordinating and negotiating their visitation. Even leaving aside such instances of direct conflict over visitation, many fathers in this sample still expressed a deep resentment over the power and control that they perceive their ex-wives to have in this arena. This rhetoric of loss of familial access is implicit in the accounts of one father who characterized his ex-wife in this way:

[My ex-wife makes visitation] a real control issue. You pick them up when I say, you bring them back when I say. And you have to live by these rules. Be there at 8 or 5 or 6 or whatever. And basically I have to live -- I need to be flexible but she doesn't . . . . I mean, I feel like she's the gatekeeper and I think she relishes that role.

Another father expressed his sentiments more forcefully, in a narrative that reflects a barely concealed rage spurred in large part by the shifting gender order in the family:
There's been times where I went to pick up the kids and one time in particular you know, this is real early in the divorce, pull up to the house, go up to the door, and she says, [John], I haven't got my child support check. Don't tell me about it, talk to child support. [Then she says] well, the kids aren't going. Which, at that point, that's a pure power play -- look. I kicked his ass off the front porch of this house and I didn't lay a hand on him . . . . The only thing I can do [in this situation] is lose. She is in total control of my time, total control of any contact I have with my children. To this day she still is . . . [I am] very angry. And see, this is where I think you're getting into situations where an individual such as myself is being pushed and taken advantage of and you wonder why people are getting beat up, women are getting beaten.

In contrast to this narrative's resort to violence, the narrative of another study participant reflected a sense of resignation about the ex-wife's increasing family power:

If [my ex-wife] chooses to not have them call me or not allow them to talk to me on the phone, there's very little recourse I have other than to go back to court which can be a lengthy process. And you're always feeling like you're held by the seat of your pants as far as she's in control . . . . There's not such clear direction of what [I could do or what the courts would do] if she didn't let me see my kids.

As these narratives illustrate, after divorce these noncustodial fathers' perceived a sharp decrease in their family authority and their influence in their children's everyday lives. Former wives were a particular focus of these fathers' sense of resentment over such decreases because they perceived the ex-wives to have gained disproportionate and undue amounts of power in the postdivorce family. This finding finds reflections in Arendell's (1992, 1995) research exposing men's shared "masculinist discourse of divorce." This discourse was characterized by, among other things, men's sense of being unseated from their positions of privilege in the family, which is a step that they perceive as a violation of their basic rights. Likewise, other researchers have highlighted the reduced senses of control and power that men experience after divorce. Umberson and Williams (1993), for example, concluded that underlying divorced fathers' parental role strain is the perception
that they are losing control over their families. In addition, Fox and Blanton (1995) identified the renegotiation of processes of power within families as central to fathers' postdivorce adjustment.

**Parental authority.** Stemming from their diminished position of power in the postdivorce family, the participants in this study perceived a loss of control over their relationships with their children. Given the contradictory nature of gender in families, such a perceived decline in parental power and authority in divorce is perhaps not surprising. That is, the gendered division of labor in families actually places limits on men's ability to exercise parental power, because women conventionally monopolize certain relationships, skills, and knowledge (Connell, 1987). Women's power in such arenas may be kept hidden in marriage (Pestello & Voyandoff, 1991) and become exposed by the divorce transition. For example, research indicates that fathers often benefit when their wives provide socioemotional connections between them and other family members (Brooks & Gilbert, 1995). In particular, Doyle (1989) contends that a husband's difficulty in dealing with emotional relations with children cause him to expect his wife to act as a sort of "personal emissary" (p. 248) to convey his feelings. The perceived advantage of this gendered parenting pattern for fathers may actually translate into a weakening of parental authority in the context of divorce when family relationships are renegotiated and realigned.

The narrative data in this study demonstrate fathers' sense of frustration and loss spurred by their ex-wives' intrusions into, and control over, the father-child relationship.
For example, one man chronicled his concerns about his postdivorce paternal authority in a way that mirrored the expressions of many fathers in this study:

[My relationship with my son has changed] in subtle ways . . . . A lot of it has come back to -- it's real obvious to my son and to me who's in control, and that's his mother. And I think that has changed some of our involvement -- some of our -- some of the authority that I might have had with him. Because, I mean, it's real obvious to him that's who -- in spite of joint custody -- it's real obvious who has the final say in most topics. So I'd say it's fairly subtle, but it still feels real significant to me.

Another father communicated his sense of powerlessness in his attempts to forge a relationship with his daughters when he said, "I know my ex has -- she has brainwashed them. She's got them dead set against me. And there's nothing I can do. I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place."

Sentiments such as these illustrate the challenge that divorce poses for men's sense of authority within their families. Although a superficial examination of these fathers' rhetoric may imply that parental authority and practice is dramatically changed as a result of the residential changes prompted by divorce, existing research suggests caution in drawing such a conclusion. For example, Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991) concluded that families after divorce look very much like families before divorce. In other words, divorce may merely expose the highly gendered patterns of parenting that existed even within the marriage.

Loss of financial control. Another arena that spurred fathers to invoke a rhetoric of entitlement was financial management. The majority of fathers in this study expressed a sense of resentment about their loss of income control within their postdivorce families.
and argued for a system within which their ex-wives would have to account for the ways in which they spent child support monies.

The narrative data in this study are replete with examples of this sort of rhetoric. One father reported that he talked to his lawyer in this regard: "I said is there any way I can get [my ex-wife] to make out a thing to find out exactly how much money is actually being spent for these girls?" Another father expressed his frustration in this way:

That gets me back to the child support. No one tells her what she has to do with that child support. There's not a clear defined -- you need to make sure kids have clothes, to you're responsible for the shelter and utilities -- [set of rules]. I think the courts, if they're going to have a father pay child support, [need a] fair system [with those kinds of rules] . . . . And that's what I get burnt over. If they're gonna say this is child support, then it ought to be child support. It shouldn't be mommy support.

Yet another father claimed, "I just hate to give her carte blanche with the monies," and therefore suggested that the child support system should use "debit cards" to ensure that mothers were spending child support money appropriately.

This study's indication that fathers often struggle to maintain their sense of financial control after divorce, aligns with the theoretical propositions of Blumberg's (1988) gender stratification theory. Her theory of gender stratification emphasizes that relative male/female control over economic resources is a main predictor of power in families. Understood within this framework, fathers' desire to maintain financial control in their postdivorce families represents an attempt to re-establish whatever family power and authority they perceive themselves to have lost.

In a similar vein, Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991) also view fathers' postdivorce financial behavior as a reaction to the disrupted conventions of gender-stratification in
families. Especially those fathers without custody of their children are faced with an incongruous situation. They may have been granted little, if any, authority over child-related decisions or ex-wives expenditures. At the same time, they were expected to continue to contribute to the economic support of their children. Thus, the two facets of the good provider role -- head of household and income earner -- were separated in the postdivorce family (Arendell, 1995). This separation, suggest Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991), may create a disruption that provides some fathers with a justification for withdrawing economic support for their families.

As this thematic analysis indicates, after divorce, fathers define family relationships within the context of entitlements. This rhetoric of entitlement encompassed beliefs about family power, control, authority and access. Divorce prompted these fathers not only to make adjustments in all of these areas, but to do so in ways that they perceived as diminishing their status. The rhetoric of entitlement, as expressed by these men, therefore, can be seen as a euphemism for male privilege within gender-stratified families.

Fathers Disrupted Positions Within A Gendered Social Structure

These same notions of relative status and authority also are central to general cultural conventions and norms of masculinity. In this study, these broader societal concerns manifest themselves in these research participants' recurrent concerns with the legal system. Specifically, the narrative data in this study demonstrate that men's sense of outrage at their devaluation following divorce extends beyond the family to include the entire legal structure surrounding the divorce process. Fathers' felt victimized at the hands of a legal system which they perceive as biased toward women. Viewed within a gender
theory context, these expressions of victimization represent a crisis of masculinity for the
fathers prompted by the divorce transition. Their weakened ability to exert their influence
and to control outcomes in a legal arena that they themselves described as conventionally
"male-dominated," is experienced as a descent from a dominant to a marginalized
masculinity (Connell, 1995). Thus, these fathers communicated a sense of feeling
diminished as compared to "other" men, whose lives, on the surface, seemed to represent a
normative enactment of the masculine ideal. In other words, these men's positions within
a patriarchal social order felt threatened. Demonstrations of this perception are embedded
within fathers' descriptions of their experiences in the court system, their opinions of
lawyers, as well as their sense of indignation at the unfair depictions of divorced fathers in
the media.

The court system. As noted earlier, all of the participants in this study held a
common disdain for the judicial system surrounding divorce. Although levels of
engagement with the legal system -- as well as specific legal outcomes -- varied
substantially, the generally shared viewpoint was that divorce law unjustly disadvantages
men and favors women. For example, although one father achieved very favorable
outcomes with respect to custody of his children, he nevertheless maintained a core belief
in the injustice of the judicial system for men:

It's so gender biased . . . . He said, you're fighting an uphill battle, because you are
a typical working father that supports his family . . . . [You'll be] fighting an uphill
battle . . . and it's a really steep hill . . . . What you should be able to do is what
into a courtroom and get a fair shake, which is impossible . . . even if a judge
[seems] totally neutral, I think most men feel that the bias is there because of the
war stories that you hear. Most judges, from what I've heard, are a little older,
they're a lot more conservative in many cases, and as a result because of their age,
in many cases, I believe they tend to favor the feminine side -- the female side of the case.

Fathers often situated their attitudes about gender bias in the context of custody decisions. Perhaps because their sense of entitlement to access and authority within the family was so firmly established, many fathers expressed the belief that they were the better parent and would have received custody of their children if the legal system were gender-neutral:

But if I would file today for custody of those children, I firmly believe that in a fair courtroom, and those are hard to find, a fair non-sexually biased courtroom, non-gender biased courtroom, I think I would have custody of the kids, no question.

Fathers further expressed a profound sense of victimization and powerlessness at the hands of the courts. For example, these fathers often complained that they could not voice their grievances about their ex-wives' actions without actually hiring an attorney and pursuing formal judicial proceedings. When describing the feelings evoked by their involvement in the judicial system, typical comments included, "Well, you feel powerless. You feel disenfranchised. You feel like you have no voice . . . so your rights as a parent, as a father, have been taken," and " . . . I have no rights, period. Plain and simple, I have no rights!"

These responses can be usefully framed with the interpretations offered by Emery et al. (1991). These researchers compared fathers who negotiated custody through mediation and through the adversary system. They found "voice" to be of considerable significance to fathers. Even though the actual settlements reached by the mediation and litigation groups did not differ in terms of the amount of time they were able to spend with their children, the mediation group's experience was more positive, suggesting that an
opportunity to have their voices heard and an affirmation of their parental role is, at least in part, what fathers are seeking.

Emery et al.'s (1991) conclusion clearly resonates in this study as well. Those majority of fathers who felt that their voices were not heard expressed feelings of powerlessness and victimization. And even the one father who felt somewhat satisfied with his treatment in the legal system identified "voice" as being of central importance to him:

I represented myself. I defended myself. I had my say as an individual and I had my say as my own legal counsel . . . . People tell me, you know, an attorney can't do anymore than you can do. They know what the law is, but they can't change it, so anything you got to say ain't going to change regardless of if you want to represent yourself. And tell him what you think and what the pros and cons are -- you've got the lawyer and no judge can say, no, you can't say this. You can say anything you want to, so I did . . . . I was pleased . . . I got my own say . . . It was good that [my voice] was heard.

Attorneys and judges. During the divorce process, many fathers come to believe that they have lost power and control over parts of their lives. Not only do these men feel like they have been stripped of their father role by the court, but they also feel that they have been abused by the court and treated unfairly. Attorneys and judges were particular targets of fathers' anger and frustration in this study. The vast majority of fathers in this study spoke with disdain about lawyers, both their own and those representing their ex-wives. The experience of one father is illustrative:

I've been through four lawyers and I haven't found one yet that I think is worth anything. So even though I hired somebody and they were supposed to be my advocate in the court system, it didn't feel that way at all. It felt like they were on the other side most of the time. I can go up and pull some paperwork out of the file cabinet that shows you most of the people in Marion County feel that way. There's not a lawyer you can trust.
Other fathers felt that their lawyers' closeted negotiations unfairly excluded them from the legal process. For example, one father expressed his resentment at being marginalized in this way:

And you know another thing -- they go out to Perkins [Restaurant] and have breakfast, and this came from my attorney. They settle a case out there before it ever goes to court. I know it happens. I've got a friend who goes out there and eats a lot and I know it happens because I've heard him tell me . . . . Oh yeh, I think [my] case was settled before it even went to court. And when we went to court it was just a figure of speech -- just to make it look good. I really mean it. Because you had to be there; things that went on in court that day was ridiculous.

Such complaints about "money hungry" lawyers, and biased or ineffective judges, were particularly shrill because the men in this study had expected the system, which they saw as male-dominated, to function as an "old boys network" offering them protection and assisting in the perpetuation of their privileged role. This sense of exclusion by a male-dominated legal network was reflected in the following fathers' narrative: "I know the judge too. The judge was a personal friend of mine who I had done a lot of work with in the courts. And he wasn't cutting me any slack." Another father felt disadvantaged by the "old boys" system of favors because, in his divorce, this system worked to his ex-wife's benefit:

Well, we've done a pretty good job. We fought the best we could. But basically we're dealing with local courts, local judges, and in my case the judge and my wife's attorney had a special relationship . . . . I'm sure that I feel that I haven't gotten a fair shake, but basically I'm intelligent enough to understand that my wife happened to get an attorney who is running for judge, who won a primary election, who will probably be elected a judge in November. He was a protege or kind of a political and personal friend of the judge in the case. And the attorney hired to handle our financial situation knows that he will be trying cases in all probability in front of this attorney -- to be judge -- so I thing there was probably some bias that way.
The men in this study seemed to sense the irony that characterizes the sense that all men are inevitably subject to inequities in divorce. That is, as Franklin (1988) claimed, "basically, in America, men make the laws, men break the laws, and men sidestep the laws -- it is all part of men's culture" (pp. 49-50). Nevertheless, while the men in this study generally supported the notion that men, as a group, have a superordinate social and legal status, divorce also has prompted them to perceive that the benefits of that membership were not available to them.

**Societal imagery surrounding divorced fathers.** Another element in participants' perception that the benefits of membership in the male culture are not universally available is their claim that media portrayals and societal imagery surrounding divorced fathers are unfair and misinformed. At least half of the men participating in this study made explicit reference to such biased depictions, and vividly described their outrage at being vilified in this manner. In particular, the men in this study expressed strong resentment for the characterization of divorced fathers as "deadbeat dads." Critiques of this pervasive cultural image included passionate narratives such as "There's all kinds of press on the fathers who don't pay child support and what ying-yangs they are . . . it's degrading"; "Dead beat dads on posters and being a dead beat father -- even the National Inquirer devotes a page to them"; and "Well, [you're a divorced father so] you're a dumb ass, you're a dead beat dad. You're trash, you're scum, you're slime. You're not paying your child support [so] you're a dead beat."
Moreover, these men felt that their vilification was accompanied by a commensurate elevation in the status of their ex-wives. One father expressed his resentment about the shift in relative position and status in this way:

Nine times out of ten, the divorced mother is made out to be a victim. You know, the husband cheated on her -- and in some cases she cheats on him -- but men have just been stigmatized with this cheating mentality. This affair mentality . . . . But I just think men, in my opinion, just flat out don't have the luxury of social status that a divorced woman would.

In sum, in each of these ways, the fathers in this study experienced a challenge to their predivorce status within society at large. Indeed, a consistent theme in these men's narrative accounts was their overwhelming conviction that men are victimized in and after divorce. Their persistent focus was on their diminished status, both relative to ex-wives and to other men. This preoccupation with status and victimization also is reflected within the family unit, where men often experienced dramatic shifts in their positions of parental authority.

By attending closely to the voices of these fathers, we are able to understand that their experiences and perceptions are tied to collective social arrangements in which men's gender privilege is implicit in cultural conventions both within and outside the family. And the common link in these men's narratives points to the crisis of gender relations that divorce signifies for men. Moreover, changes in the gender order influence of the construction of masculinities, as men respond to changing relations of gender power. The next chapter now turns to an examination of these constructions, exploring the ways in which men recreate themselves as explicitly gendered individuals through their responses to the transitions prompted by divorce.
CHAPTER 6

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF GENDER AFTER DIVORCE

The Social Construction of Gender: Theoretical Underpinnings

As is done in this study, an examination, of the ways in which fathers construct gender in marriage and then reconstruct it in the context of divorce, ultimately reflects the increased attention feminist scholars are paying to the dynamic nature of gender (Connell, 1987) and to the significance of human agents in the creation and recreation of femininity, masculinity, and existing gender arrangements (Taylor, 1996; Thorne, 1995). Rather than locating gender within the individual and treating it merely as the internalization of normative cultural ideology, feminist-informed theories emphasize that gender is socially constructed -- both through interpersonal interaction (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and through interaction with the structures of the surrounding world (Kaufman, 1994). Under this view, gender is conceptualized as an internally complex structure, with a contradictory and fluid character. In particular, the ways in which individuals create gender in concrete social circumstances can simultaneously be supportive and subversive of gender as an institution (Connell, 1987).
In this chapter, therefore, I draw upon my analysis of fathers' struggles over the meaning and practice of fatherhood in divorce to theorize both the maintenance and reproduction of conventional gender relations, as well as processes of resistance, challenge, and change. Moreover, because systems of gender stratification are best understood as systematically related to other systems of stratification, including race, class, and sexual orientation (Collins, 1990; Glenn, 1987; Zinn, 1990), I also attend to the inter-connections between these power hierarchies. Because of the nature of my sample, however, social class is the primary axis from which I can begin to theorize the interaction between stratification in the broader society and gender relations of power in families.

Paradoxes of Gender

Application of this theoretical perspective suggests that, because it creates a disruption of the gender order in families, divorce offers an opportune context within which to explore men's gender (re)constructions. Moreover, because the creation and recreation of gender is always situated within concrete social circumstances, divorce offers a setting that can illuminate the gender contradictions that may arise when structural outcomes are not easily controlled. Embedded within fathers' narrative accounts of their diminished status and power following divorce are contradictory constructions of gender that simultaneously support and challenge normative gender arrangements in families. Such paradoxical constructions cluster around two distinct, yet interrelated domains: (a) concurrent support for, and critique of, traditional family ideology and (b) paradoxical coexistence of perceived powerlessness and actual (if latent) power.
Traditional Family Ideology

These research participants' ideological beliefs about "the family" present a fundamental paradox. On the one hand, these fathers espoused belief in the superiority of the traditional, gender-structured family form. On the other hand, they simultaneously resisted traditional family ideology, in particular with regard to the legal system that they described as unfairly promoting the traditional, gender-structured family model.

Both sides of the paradox are amply reflected in this study's narratives. With respect to the promotion of traditional families, many fathers tacitly embraced conventional notions about what constitutes a healthy family through their largely negative attitudes about divorce. Perhaps because so many of the fathers in this sample viewed the traditional nuclear family as the most functional family form, they characterized divorce as a last resort that they never expected to face. For example, one father reported that he had hoped to work things out with his ex-wife, but that, in the end, she decided the marriage was over; he described his feelings about the divorce in this way:

And when I was growing up I said when I got married, that was going to be it. It's going to be the one person that I'm going to marry. I didn't get married until I was 28. I thought -- I know I was wrong -- but I didn't agree with, I didn't want a divorce . . . . Both parties have to be willing to try and save the marriage and, I guess, change. That's hard for a person to do. So in some cases I believe divorce is the only measure, but before I didn't. I believed that everything could be worked out in some way or another.

Moreover, some fathers went on to describe the ways in which they believe divorce harms children. By doing so, they communicated their belief in the superiority of the traditional, married family form. One father, for example, painted a vivid picture of what he considered to be a model family:
I was always the kind of father that really wanted someone home with those kids. And the reason I say that is because I think, as parents, we have abandoned our children . . . . And I was fortunate enough that I made a good enough salary by myself that [my wife] didn't have to work . . . . [We have] robbed [our children] of what I consider to be -- I want a nice family -- you come home and it's Christmas Eve, and you open all your presents and you have dinner. Okay, that's me. [My ex-wife] wasn't raised that way. I was raised that way. And I want that. And I want that for those kids and I want that. I think basically what's happened is that they have been robbed of something. And it's hard to put into words what they've been robbed of, but I think they have had part of their lives stolen from them by the divorce action . . . I just think they have been robbed.

In a similar vein, another father illustrated his core ideological belief system when he likened divorce to dysfunctionality:

Unless we do something to fundamentally change the attitudes of society . . . [to] do what's fundamentally right by our kids . . . in terms of we're going to have an unusually high divorce rate. We're going to continue to have broken families, homes that are dysfunctional, families that don't communicate, children who bare those scars, emotionally or otherwise.

Likewise, with respect to their challenge of traditional family ideology, several fathers expressed the hope that, after divorce, they could develop new or continuing nurturant relationships with their children. Yet these fathers often perceived themselves as "locked" into gendered relational configurations by a legal system that they criticized as being built on a traditional, gender-structured family model. For example, one father believed that the legal system had denied him the opportunity to truly parent his daughter after divorce, and described the ideological underpinnings of what he considered to be an unjust system in this way:

There's a strong gender bias toward the mother. It's structured that way. I don't know if that's terribly -- I mean, it's understandable . . . . I think they honestly believe that a man [can only be] a provider. And I don't know who they thought changed [Jane's] diapers, or [if they thought that only her mother] did that, because it's not true. I don't know who they thought picked her up when she
cried. Who did her laundry. Her hair might have looked pretty bad growing up until I got the hang of that stuff, but the bottom line is, I think they looked at somehow the mother has those bonding, nurturing kinds of behaviors that moms are meant to do. Fundamentally in this society, culturally that's the role of a mom. Therefore, the child needs to be with their mother. When, in reality, that is not the case . . . . It's stereotyped. it's prejudiced, it's discrimination.

Fathers' contradictory gender constructions emanated from settled gender patterns existing both within and outside of the marriage. During the marriage, such traditional gender-structured arrangements appear to have worked to these men's benefit. Indeed, in the course of recounting after the marriage the various losses that they had experienced as a result of divorce, these fathers adopted idealized views of these traditional ideological notions. At the same time, however, in describing their postdivorce experience, these men became advocates for a different approach to family structure. These fathers perceived themselves to have lost a great deal with respect to parent-child relations following divorce, and they now actively placed blame on the legal system for perpetuating the very gender-structured patterns that may well have characterized their married families and for which they continue to express admiration. It is only when the postdivorce context causes these fathers to negatively experience gender-structured parenting arrangements that they challenge those arrangements as improper obstacles to their desired family roles. One father typified this approach when he commented, "I really think the [child custody] system needs to be restructured so there's not all this pressure that's put on one parent or the other based on what they have done [in the past]."

This shift in fathers' attitudes about the superiority of traditional gender-structured families can be usefully analyzed through Gerson and Peiss' (1985) conceptualization of
gender consciousness. They theorize gender consciousness along a continuum that reflects noncritical acceptance of gender relations at one pole and a critical challenge of the gender order at the other pole. These authors also raise pertinent questions about the influence of relative power on shaping gender consciousness.

The divorced fathers in this study, with their shifting attitudes toward gender-structured parenting arrangements, can be theorized to have moved from the noncritical acceptance pole, more to the middle of the continuum with a recognition of the rights and obligations that go along with being male or female. These fathers did experience movement in their gender consciousness. But a persistent sense of entitlement to their privileged family positions places obvious limits on the changes that these fathers will experience as a result of the realigned family relationships prompted by divorce. They perceive these realignments primarily in terms of the impact on their relative power and authority. And they express a desire not to alter the overall system of male dominance, but rather to readjust the gender-based boundaries in limited ways, with an underlying goal of recapturing attributes of their former privileged status. They thus fall short of developing a fuller critical consciousness of the ways in which gender stratification within marriage不同地分配资源和奖励给男性在家庭中的利益，而且可能会在未来的其他关系或不同社会背景下受益。
Contradictory Coexistence of Perceived Powerlessness and Actual Power

As Brod and Kaufman (1994) theorize, there are both continuities and discontinuities between men's structural positions in hierarchies of power and men's own felt experience of power. The results of this study suggest that divorce provokes such discontinuities. Factors such as these lead to men's paradoxical experience of perceived powerlessness and actual (if latent) power. This contradictory coexistence is repeatedly reflected in this study's narrative data, both for the group as a whole, as well as within the individual accounts of a substantial number of the fathers in this study. The narrative accounts of two fathers, in particular, provide exemplars of such paradoxes of gender.

First, one upper-income father talked openly about the ways in which he used his financial resources to obtain the custody outcomes that he desired after divorce. As a result of his legal maneuverings, this father was awarded joint physical custody of his children, and furthermore, at the time of our first interview, he considered himself the primary custodial parent, spending five or six days a week with his children. Admittedly, this father's social and economic position allowed him certain advantages in the divorce process. One such advantage was explained in this way:

[My wife] tried to get an attorney in Marion. Couldn't find an attorney to take the case because nobody wanted to mess with me I guess. Now for what reason I don't know, other than the fact that we've tried to build up a really good loyal local relationship and I didn't think anybody wanted to step on that. Because it was the family has done real well here and has always been a real charitable type organization and I don't think anybody wanted to mess with it. That's my opinion.
Yet this same father also expressed his feelings of powerlessness at the hand of a gender biased legal system that, he recounted, always favors the mother in custody decisions. His narrative accounts around such issues were emphatic:

> Just the gender bias. It's so gender biased . . . . Because you are a typical working father, supports his family . . . . I got scared to death . . . . And I don't ever want to go back into the courtroom again. If I do, I know that I can do nothing but lose. I cannot win . . . . No matter how much I do with those kids, I cannot win . . . . I will never in a million years come out on the positive side of any action.

Likewise, another father's story demonstrates the ways in which he utilized his resources to effectively negotiate the system and to produce favorable outcomes. This father also was awarded joint physical custody of his son, and further reported that things were going very well in his postdivorce family. Moreover, he portrayed the legal process surrounding his divorce as rather uncomplicated and productive:

> It was forty-two days from start to finish. That was fabulous. Three hundred fifty dollars in legal fees. [Jane] and I decided at the table [that] we needed to come to some type of agreement . . . . And I saw the papers that talked about shared parenting. That sounded like the route to go. My ex-wife agreed with that and with the financial situation . . . .

As evidenced by this narrative, this father negotiated the divorce process effectively. Yet, despite this obvious success, he too expressed an underlying sense of powerlessness with regard to the legal structures surrounding divorce: "A man can't win. He cannot win. I'm convinced of that . . . it's just one of those things where the male dominated society end up kicking the male in the butt in some situations." Indeed, like so many of the fathers in this study, he constructed himself as a member of a disadvantaged group that defines itself, to a large extent, as impotent in the face of a commanding legal system.
This paradoxical co-existence of actual power and felt powerlessness suggests that there are ways in which the gender experience is a conflictual one. Part of this conflict is between the cultural definitions and ideals of manhood and the social possibilities of particular groups of men. The common feature of the dominant ideal of contemporary masculinity is that manhood is equated with possessing and exercising some sort of power (Kaufman, 1994). That is, the internalization and enactment of masculinity is experienced as a system not simply of men's power over women but also of hierarchies of power among different groups of men and between different masculinities (Connell, 1995). And although most men cannot possibly measure up to hegemonic ideals, those ideals nonetheless maintain a forceful presence in men's lives. Application of this analytic framework, therefore, suggests that divorce creates a set of social circumstances for fathers in which they feel that the gap between the masculine ideal and their ability to enact that ideal has widened. For example, even when individual fathers obtain what they define as successful divorce outcomes, their identification with divorced fathers collectively engenders a sense of being weak and ineffectual at the hands of a commanding legal system. As a result, these men experience a sense of powerlessness that overrides the externally defined circumstances of their lives.

Theorizing Gender Reproduction and Gender Change

As a general matter, feminists seek to understand both the maintenance and reproduction of conventional gender relations, as well as processes of resistance and change (Connell, 1987; Thorne, 1995). This study is well positioned to meet this challenge. I examine the variety of ways in which men recreate themselves as gendered
individuals through their responses to the changing relations of gender power prompted by divorce. In this postdivorce re-ordering, some research participants attempted to establish a dominant masculinity in terms of their power, authority, and control. At the same time, divorce prompted some fathers to resist norms of dominant masculinity, and further, to defy conventional representations of divorced fathers as absent parents. Moreover, it is important to note at the outset that these two processes are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, because gender is an internally complex and contradictory accomplishment (Connell, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987), many fathers will simultaneously enact a dominant masculinity and present challenges to such normative ideals.

(Re)establishing a Dominant Masculinity

Simply put, the social construction of gender involves constructing "maleness" and "femaleness" as oppositional categories (Ferree, 1990) and is a primary way of signifying relationships of power (Scott, 1986). The narrative data in this study are replete with illustrations of such gender constructions. The frequency of these gender constructions demonstrates that there are numerous ways in which men, following divorce, recreate themselves as explicitly masculine individuals. The repeated inclusion of these gender assertions in this study's narrative data also is consistent with Arendell's (1995) research findings. She found that fathers' postdivorce adjustment centers on efforts to re-establish and re-assert their identities as men. Moreover, by seeking "to sustain a certain gendered ego ideal" (Hochschild, 1990), a majority of the fathers in this study, like most of the
fathers participating in Arendell's (1995) research, employed specific strategies to preserve their gendered identities.

In general, the men in this study consistently constructed their gender in opposition to, and as in some ways superior to, women. These constructions are embedded throughout the research narratives, but are evidenced in a highly focused manner in these fathers' accounts of parenting issues. Specifically these gender constructions center around which parent is most deserving of receiving custody of the children, as well as around financial issues.

The majority of fathers participating in this study prominently constructed themselves in opposition to their ex-wives. These men portrayed themselves as having more effective parenting ability. For example, one father constructed himself in the masculine ideal of rationality. He recounted the ways in which his ex-wife inappropriately expressed her rage, which he felt led, in turn, to confusing and harming the children:

She would call and rant and rave about things and, talk about literally making up lies about the kind of person I was. Telling me what a rotten father I was. How my kids hated me. You know, all this stuff going on over the phone . . . . I got the kids together when I had them one weekend and I said, I have a tape of some things you mother said. I don't particularly want to play that tape for you but I'll share with you the jist of what she said. And the reason I'm doing this is I have no idea the things she's telling you . . . . I've always tried to maintain a sense of not saying anything [negative] about their mom to the kids. [saying nothing other than] positives.

A clear majority of the fathers' narrative accounts included implicit parallel condemnations, with comments such as "I don't want to seem bragging or nothing, but I know I could give them a better life. There's structure here. Better discipline . . . . If you go to her apartment, it's so cluttered. The kids -- I mean, there is stuff everywhere. That really
bothered me," and "I mean she talks the talk but I don't think she walks the walk as far as being a mother."

Men's devaluations of their former wives also centered on discussions of financial management and accountability for spending patterns. As discussed earlier, when asked to characterize their ex-wives, the majority of participants in this study voiced a variety of negative opinions. Serious concerns about poor money management topped the list. Moreover, most of these fathers also voiced a desire for their ex-wives to be held strictly accountable for ways in which child support monies are spent. These attitudes reflect fathers' expectation that they continue to have dominance in family relationships. For example, fathers commonly belittled their ex-wives for irresponsible and self-indulgent spending patterns. One man expressed his frustration in this way:

My ex thinks that she should have everything . . . come to find out my ex and her sister . . . between the two of them they sent [my kids'] grandma and grandpa on a Caribbean cruise . . . and I know my ex doesn't make -- when they was checking to see what she made, she made $5000 a year. So I said, well, I know where the child support is going then.

Expression of these sorts of frustrations frequently led to declarations about the need for accountability with regard to spending child support funds. Fathers consistently invoked notions of control when talking about such financial issues. For example, after telling his Caribbean cruise story, this research participant continued by stating, "[It's] terrible. There's nothing I can do about it. I talked to my lawyer and I said is there any way I can get her to make out a thing to find out exactly how much money is being spent for [my daughters]?" Another father stated, "[There's a] lack of control -- this is what the money is supposed to be used for . . . And that's what I get burnt over."
As the above examples illustrate, after divorce, one way in which men re-assert their sense of masculinity is to construct themselves as superior to their ex-wives. Derogatory remarks about these men's ex-wives were commonplace in the majority of participants' descriptions, and such comments were more extensive than overt claims of general male superiority. These constructions not only serve to distinguish maleness and femaleness in these men's recollections, but also act to signify for these fathers a re-creation of the traditional provider, head of household role -- that is, the conventional male-identified family role.

The evidence in this study of fathers' frequent constructions of their masculinity in opposition to their ex-wives aligns well with theories of masculine socialization. For example, Brooks and Gilbert (1995) report that males' resistance to women develops, to a large extent, because young males are socialized restrictively, and taught to distrust and reject all that is feminine. In fact, some theorists have noted that masculinity is often defined less by what it is than by what it is not -- that is, not feminine (Doyle, 1988). Thus, perhaps because it serves to effectively bolster fathers' sense of themselves as men, men's denigrating of women is a central element of the traditional male culture (Franklin, 1988).

Challenges To a Dominant Masculinity

While some fathers in this study attempted to establish a dominant masculinity in terms of family power, authority, and control, divorce prompted other research participants to counter conventional norms and to fundamentally reconstruct their definitions and enactments of the father role. Many divorced fathers were committed to
actively parenting their children, but two fathers in this sample made major changes to become more fully involved in caring for their children after divorce. Arendell (1995) likewise found that a minority of fathers in her sample exhibited innovative and involved parenting patterns after divorce.

Neither of these two fathers had been a primary parent during marriage. Rather, divorce was a pivotal transformative point in their lives, leading to enhanced parenting. These fathers believed that they had become more committed and conscientious parents following divorce, both by choice and by necessity. They could no longer rely as extensively on the children's mother to carry out major day-to-day childrearing responsibilities or to serve as gatekeepers for parenting responsibilities. Women in general did, however, serve as these men's parenting models. The ways in which women serve as a standard against which these fathers consider their fathering work is reflected in the following account:

Now that I am the -- I consider myself to be the primary caregiver. I'm on the PTO at school. I'm a room mother for both kids. I bake cupcakes for them. I make sure they get dinner every night. I make sure they do their homework every night. I take my daughter to piano lessons. I take my daughter to dance lessons. I take my son to gymnastics. He started swimming lessons. And basically what's happened is I've made a drastic role reversal to the point that I'm now the classic Mr. Mom type figure and it's all worked well because it's taught me a lot of respect for women. I've got a lot of respect for mothers. Especially the ones who stay home with the kids. I have a lot of respect for that. It's a whole new job. It's not easy. It's tough.

A second father similarly recounted the way in which he transformed the difficult situation of divorce into a positive parenting opportunity:

I would say I'm spending more time with my son [since the divorce]. Yeh, definitely. And I needed to do that because [before I was all] caught up in work
and unfortunately I didn't do a very good job [of fathering]. I mean that's the word -- if you are a good provider . . . [Now, fathering is] of utmost importance. More so than it was. Once again, I just took too many things for granted . . . . I think one of the things that is important is that you make sure you spend quality time because you might not be here tomorrow.

For these fathers, parenting was enhanced, rather than diminished, by divorce. Divorce had empowered them to break out of traditional modes of fathering. Two factors in these fathers' lives seemed essential in order for them to effect this transformation: choice and opportunity. As Cohen (1987) explains, choice is related to the concept of role attachment (Goffman, 1966), and is defined as a psychological investment or commitment. The degree to which men actually will enact a role to which they are attached, however, is dependent to a large extent on opportunity -- the commitments one has made and the consequences of those commitments (Ferree, 1990). In the case of these two fathers, their opportunity to enact the father role after divorce resulted, to a large extent, from their substantial economic resources and flexible work circumstances. Many other men may likewise have chosen an expanded parenting role but felt cabined by limited financial resources. Such limitations impacted their ability to effectively negotiate the legal system with respect to custody, and also meant that the constraints of their work lives were more limiting. The two fathers without such limits recognized the unique nature of their positions -- high income; self-employed; and work schedule flexibility. These men also both reported that they thought their success in negotiating the legal system was unique and a result largely of their financial resources. One of these fathers, for example, said, "I bought my children." Ironically, this father also spoke about how his ex-wife no longer was able to attain his idealized vision of
mothering -- i.e., stay at home, "soccer mom" -- because she lacked the financial resources to do so.

These fathers' parenting transformations thus can be theorized as acts of resistance to societal conventions of divorced fathers as uninvolved and uninvested parents. Such individual transformations act to challenge the established gender order. Indeed, as Coltrane (1994) argues, fathers' engaged involvement in their children's lives has implications for changing the larger system of gender relations by promoting gender equality. This form of resistance, however, is not without its ambivalence and struggle. Arendell (1995), for example, reported that the innovative and nurturing fathers in her study paid a price in terms of gender identity for rejecting the constraints of conventional fathering norms. In fact, she found that identity questions persistently confronted such fathers, and that, although they sought behavioral alternatives, they nonetheless used the norms of masculinity as their standard of self-measurement (Pleck, 1992). These struggles are mirrored in the changing circumstances of many fathers in American culture. Gerson (1993), for example, reports that while changing personal experiences and circumstances have provoked many fathers to fully involve themselves in the daily care and nurturing of their children, such shifts often involve sacrifices in terms of career advancement and social status.

Traces of such a gender struggle also are found in this study. Because creating oneself as a gendered individual involves ambivalence and struggle (West & Zimmerman, 1987), even those fathers who exhibit dramatic change following divorce, display contradictory constructions of gender. That is, those two fathers who developed new,
reciprocally nurturant postdivorce relationships with their children found themselves at odds with conventional norms and expectations of masculinity. Perhaps to negotiate the tension inherently created by such a subversion of gender norms, those fathers also re-established a sense of themselves as men through a masculine divorce discourse (Arendell, 1995). One father, for example, framed his postdivorce fathering as somehow deviant when he said, "I have the kids roughly five to six days a week. I'm involved in the PTO, I'm a room mother, I do all those things that their mother, in my opinion, should or could or would be doing were this a normal functioning family." This father also asserted a conventionally masculine dominance when discussing his ex-wife's visitation schedule:

I don't discourage [my children] from seeing their mother, but if she's late to pick them up, I give her hell -- if you're going to pick up those kids you better be on time. And when she brings them back to me, because I'm always really punctual with them, when she brings them back to me, if she's late, I raise hell. And the reason I do it is because I have to dish out my own brand of shit, okay. But I have to dish that out and I'm gonna do it. And that's kind of the way I do it. You're late! Where are you?! If she ever has to do homework on a Wednesday night and it's not done right, [I say] it's not done properly!

Likewise, the other father who exhibited dramatic change in his fathering role, experienced a similar fluidity of identity. Thus, his challenge to normative gender arrangements was not consistent across different situations and contexts. In some settings, this father evidenced his re-establishment of the masculine ideal. In particular, providing male role modeling for his son was a primary strategy that this man utilized to construct a dominant masculinity:

If you can direct them in certain ways. You can't make them do anything, but he's got plenty of baseballs and basketballs and footballs. There's not a piano or, you know, ballerina shoes or anything around here which -- if that's what he wanted to
do I'm not opposed to that, but I think you can have a big direction upon your children just by what you expose them to.

The Interlocking Systems of Gender and Social Class: Fatherhood and the Hegemonic Ideal

A clear association between conceptualizations of masculinity, on the one hand, and social class, on the other, emerged from the narrative data in this study. This interlocking connection becomes visible within the context of these research participants' differing enactments of masculinity, and, in particular, with respect to how these fathers approach and attain masculine ideals. Two distinct conceptual strains form the backdrop against which this gender/social class interaction plays itself out. Before turning to the narrative data, therefore, it is useful to briefly review these theoretical and ideological perspectives.

Masculinity Theory

First, Connell (1995) theorizes about the existence of multiple masculinities and emphasizes the need to examine the interplay among them. These forms of masculinity align themselves in a quasi-hierarchical fashion. At the apex is hegemonic masculinity. While this notion is most typically described with reference to men's dominance over, and subordination of, women, its most relevant manifestation for purposes of this study revolves around more general concepts of authority and societal power. Hegemonic masculinity can be described as the form of masculinity that embodies the hallmarks of successful manhood in this culture. In particular, attainment of wealth and financial resources, and of positions enabling men to exert power in business, in government, in
athletics, or in the family, all are notions that traditionally are ascribed to "the successful man." In essence, hegemonic masculinity involves men's dominant positions within, and unchecked authority over, their domains. Within this theoretical framework, the man who successfully attains hegemonic masculinity is able to enact the culturally dominant ideal of manhood in which men have a successful claim to authority and power. Moreover, a central notion in this theory is that hegemony is attained in its ultimate form only where there is some correspondence between cultural ideals and institutional power.

For this study, the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is exhibited in the father role is particularly relevant. A primary manifestation of hegemonic masculinity in the family is in men's quest for unchallenged authority with respect to financial affairs. That is, in the hegemonic masculine model, men focus on their role as the primary provider of financial resources for their families. In addition, they also view themselves as the primary decision-maker with respect to how financial resources are allocated.

In describing hegemonic masculinity, and identifying other distinct practices of masculinity as well, Connell (1995) emphasizes that masculinity is best viewed as fluid, rather than static. Indeed, he notes that masculinity is always changing and evolving in light of shifting societal influences, as well as in light of men's changing life position and family status. Thus, theoretical accounts should recognize that the practice of masculinity is embedded within particular situations and contexts, and further, should consider and explain processes of change.
Gender Ideology and Fatherhood Ideals

American imagery surrounding fatherhood historically has been rooted in more general societal assumptions about men, and has found its foundation in dominant ideologies of gender (Cohen, 1993). For example, Industrialization prompted a shift in work patterns, causing fathers to assume a more distant, indirect role in their children's lives, while mothers came to be viewed as vitally important in the daily lives of their children. This led, in turn, to a conception of fatherhood that focused on fathers' primary function as breadwinner (Pleck, 1987) The latter part of the Twentieth Century has witnessed further structural changes as women have moved into the labor force in increasing numbers. In response to women's increased labor force participation, a "new father" ideal has emerged. In this model, men's and women's separate spheres erode, and men are expected to assume more of the parenting and domestic duties in American families (Coltrane, 1995). As a result of this new influence, the distant father breadwinner model has eroded somewhat. Nevertheless, perhaps because the "new father" ideal is still emerging and has yet to become fully embedded in the American psyche, the father provider model has remained a dominant cultural ideology (Bernard, 1981; Pleck, 1987; Thompson & Walker, 1989)

Thus, at present, these two ideals both exert strong influences on contemporary cultural ideology surrounding fatherhood. Yet these fatherhood ideals do not easily co-exist in men's lives. These two culturally dominant ideals of fatherhood are inherently conflictual, creating significant tensions for men as they seek to enact the masculine ideal. Indeed, the ideal has almost transmogrified into a dual pursuit of these distinct agendas --
that is, fathers, to satisfy current societal conventions, seek to be both the traditional hegemonic family provider and the more contemporary "new father" with enhanced roles in parenting and domestic spheres, that, in the traditional model, were the woman's province. In short, fathers are faced with a difficult task of meeting the demands of two inconsistent models of how they should construct their masculinity.

These two different models can be viewed as, together, comprising a new hegemony. There is, in essence, a new evolution on the masculinity hierarchy. The traditional model was, historically, quite clear in terms of what conceptualization of masculinity achieved primacy. Societal changes have now called this ordering into question, thus transforming those characteristics that define the hegemonic ideal. The narrative data in this study indicate that the extent to which divorced fathers can successfully negotiate the tensions and conflicts inherent in this emergent hegemonic fatherhood model, seems to be strongly associated with their relative social class positions.

Social Class, Postdivorce Fathering, and Men's Constructions of Gender

To examine the impact of socioeconomic status on fathers' postdivorce family relationships, I stratified this sample to ensure equal representation across income groups. Such stratification is important because existing data suggest that men's attitude toward and experiences with parenting and family roles vary with socioeconomic status. For example, working class families tend to be characterized by role segregation along traditional lines (Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1976). Middle class families tend to exhibit more egalitarian ideologies, although the extent to which they are actualized varies (Ferree, 1984; Perry-Jenkins, 1994; Thoits, 1987).
The annual incomes of the fathers participating in this study ranged from $9,240 to $160,000, with a mean income of $50,612. For purposes of this analysis, the fathers were grouped into three income groups: (a) seven fathers were categorized as lower income, and had annual incomes of under $30,000; (b) seven fathers were categorized as middle income, and had annual incomes between $30,000 and $60,000; and (c) six fathers were categorized as upper income, and had incomes that exceeded $60,000 annually.

As reflected in the participants' narrative accounts, the upper income men in this study were in the best position to effectively negotiate the tension between fathers' providing role and those aspects of the father role that entail creating close, nurturant bonds with children. These fathers thus came closest to meeting the two, somewhat conflictual, ideals surrounding contemporary fatherhood.

When married, the seven participants in this study's upper-income group were the main providers of financial resources for their families. Their primary responsibility for providing, while it amply fulfilled significant aspects of the traditional hegemonic ideal, clearly limited the opportunities that these fathers had to develop an intimate involvement in their children's lives of the type prized in the "new father" model. This nurturing role, rather, was left largely to the wife. Such gender-structured social organization of marriage may have been imperceptible to these fathers while they were married, but divorce prompted a reassessment and realignment.

For example, after, and as a result of, divorce, these upper-income fathers spoke of a significant change in their consciousness about the centrality of fatherhood in their lives.
One of these fathers talked about the ways in which divorce caused a shift in his work/family priorities:

It's changed because of the divorce because family becomes more important because you have a whole lot less of it. I think the older I get the smarter I get as far as what's important in life and what's not. You gotta have a job in order to maintain -- also, if you asked me ten years ago what was more important I probably would have said the job . . . . [Now if] I have a choice between working and the kids, the kids usually win.

The circumstances surrounding another father's increased awareness were even more dramatic:

When [Jane] left me, she took the kids, left for 30 days. Wouldn't let me see them for 30 days . . . . Well that 30 days shook me up quite a bit and made me realize almost I hate to say it -- gave me religion on the importance of those children and their lives . . . . [I said to myself], now I need to figure out what I'm going to do with the rest of my life and the lives of these children and how that life is going to revolve around what they need and their activities.

Similar consciousness raising occurred across the entire income spectrum of this study. But these upper income fathers were able to move beyond merely articulating more expansive visions of their fathering roles. These fathers were, based on this study's narrative data, able to enact these new commitments through a genuinely enhanced involvement with their children -- an outcome that seemed to elude a majority of this study's middle and lower income fathers. For example, the four fathers in this study who were awarded joint custody of their children were all in the upper income group. Likewise, these fathers, as a group, recalled that, to a large extent, their substantial financial resources enabled them to effect the custody outcomes they desired. One father, for example, illustrated how his expensive, high quality legal representation made all the difference in his divorce, when he reported that "the attorney that I had and the dissolution
that I got sort of saved me... and I would have ended up with a much, much less
lucrative deal, child care wise, than I have right now."

Of course, the higher-income group's ability to effectuate this transition is no doubt
due in no small part to their relative economic privilege. This reality did not escape the
higher-income fathers. In fact, they communicated, with complete conviction, their belief
that substantial economic resources were necessary to secure a "fair" divorce settlement in
which fathers could develop and/or maintain close relationships with their children. Their
rhetoric surrounding this issue was particularly powerful; these fathers repeatedly invoked
language such as "buying" their children, "trading money for custody," and one father even
depicted his financial settlement as "ransom."

[I] bought [my children] in several ways. . . . I feel that I purchased my children.
I really feel that I bought [them] and, you know, initially so far between the losses
that my company has taken because I have not been at the helm to run them and
the payments that I've made to her, this thing has probably cost me and my
partners about a quarter of a million dollars so far to date. . . . And so it's been
expensive. Extraordinarily expensive. . . . I feel that's part of the ransom I pay,
ookay. And I'm not going to squawk or hitch about that, because if I do . . . .

Interestingly, in this passage the more traditional hegemonic form of masculinity takes
center stage. This father's rhetoric is very forceful and incorporates a language of
dominance and power. But at the same time, this father completely restructured his
parenting relationship with his children, moving much closer to, if not attaining, the "new
father" ideal. In the process, moreover, he made concrete financial and business sacrifices
that are almost antithetical to conventional hegemony. This illustrates that even for fathers
who successfully negotiate the tensions inherent in competing ideals of fatherhood and
masculinity, the conflict between those images is nonetheless palpable.
The ability of these high income fathers to successfully navigate the divorce transition did not prevent them from strongly identifying with other men, in lower-income brackets, and expressing concern for these other fathers’ likely less successful divorce experiences. For example, one upper-income father compared his situation to other, less privileged fathers and said:

I feel sorry for that guy because had I been anyone else, I'd been in horrible shape. Had I been anyone else, I may not have gotten a divorce. A lot of guys couldn't afford the kind of monies that [you need] . . . . But I really feel that the guys that don't have the cash, don't have the monies, or don't have the flexibility job wise or the resources that I had, they can't -- there's just no way.

In this respect the narratives of the higher-income fathers converged with the accounts those fathers at the other end of the social class continuum, the lower-income group. Specifically, like their higher-income counterparts, fathers in the lower-income group repeatedly acknowledged in their narratives the powerful force that economic resources exert throughout the divorce process. For example, one father clearly articulated his belief that money makes all the difference in custody decisions:

money is what it costs . . . a person who has a lot of money who wants to stay in court every other month or every week who has that kind of money to bum can probably get their children. I couldn't afford it.

In addition, another father questioned the adequacy of his legal representation and speculated that his lack of economic resources played a part in his lawyer's ineffective advocacy:

I'd like to think [my lawyer] did the best he could. I'd like to think that but sometimes I wonder. There's a lot of things I told him that he didn't pursue like the mental instability of [Jane]. He never pursued that. I'm wondering if he did that because I wasn't very rich. I'm still paying my lawyer bill now, monthly installments. He knew I wasn't rich. I paid his retainer with my vacation pay . . . .
I'm just wondering if I had tens of thousands of dollars if I could have gotten him to say well, look at this woman, she's crazy. is she really capable of raising these children -- but nobody looked into it.

These subjective perceptions of relative economic disadvantage necessarily limited these fathers' realization of the hegemonic masculine model. In particular, these fathers' self-perceived inability to successfully attain the ideal of "good provider" (Bernard, 1981), in turn, limits their capacity to experience positive outcomes in other parenting arenas. The majority of the fathers in this lower-income group recounted that their postdivorce relationships were less than ideal. Most of these fathers depicted the relationships with their children as strained, some had minimal contact, and others, notwithstanding their expressed preferences, maintained only the stereotypic every other weekend visitation schedule. For example, one father expressed his sense of frustration and defeat when he reported:

I've never seen one my kid's report cards, never seen none of their school papers. I don't know -- it's just not fair. I'm supposed to be notified. I mean. I've never been to a Christmas play or Thanksgiving play, or anything like that.

Indeed, only one father in the lower-income group portrayed a highly engaged postdivorce relationship with his children. And this father apparently was on the cusp of elevating his economic status because by the second interview he had moved well into the middle-income category. Thus, although upper-income fathers are able to utilize their institutional power to create a postdivorce family environment in which they can meet the somewhat contradictory elements in the new hegemonic father ideal, lower-income fathers, as a result of their relatively limited economic power, exhibit a corollary limit in their ability to enact their family role in a way that meets contemporary cultural ideals.
That is, emerging symbolic images of successful masculinity within the context of the family are tied to both providing and caretaking roles.

These findings that highlight the interconnections between men's relative economic disadvantage, their family roles, and their enactment of cultural ideals of masculinity are consistent with research on combining wage work and family work in working-class families. For example, most working-class wives do wage work out of economic necessity. That is, in many working-class families, both men and women are enacting providing roles and making essential contributions to the family economy (Ferree, 1987; Rosen, 1987). Yet although working-class husbands recognize the necessity of their wives' wage work, they often are unhappy about it (Rosen, 1987; Hood, 1983). The realities of class mean that working-class families often find themselves dividing paid work by gender more equitably. Husbands in these families, however, often feel conflicted because the fact that their wives must work is inherently in tension with their internal vision of themselves as family providers (Thompson & Walker, 1989).

This theoretical connection between enactments of masculinity, and providing and caretaking roles in families is further demonstrated by the experiences of middle-income fathers in this study. These divorced fathers seem to experience the most extreme tension between the traditional family provider role and the more contemporary involved caregiving role. In this sense, these fathers truly are stuck in the middle. Consistent with traditional hegemonic imagery, these fathers attach highly symbolic meaning to their provision of support. When, after divorce, they come up lacking in this area, it thus has significant impact on the postdivorce constructions of masculinity. The hegemonic ideal
entails not only provision of financial support, but also control over the ways in which economic resources are allocated. Perhaps as a result of obstacles they perceive in successfully expressing their masculinity, these middle-income fathers' desire to hold their wives accountable for child support monies is prominently featured in their narrative accounts. Fathers from the other two income groups express this sentiment as well, but, for middle-income fathers, the themes of accountability and a desire for increased control over financial management of their children's lives is an exceptionally prominent concern. For example, one father specified his attempts to establish sense of financial control in great detail:

And she's on me to pay for some of the medical bills the kids have. You know, these are bills I don't have anything to do with. I don't have input on whether they should really go see a doctor . . . . I'm going to pay those based upon her producing some sort of receipt that actually shows this money. I'm not going to pay it on her say so . . . . And so I told her, if you want to itemize everything out here, and I can verify that indeed you did have these medical bills, I'm not going to go against what the decree says. I told her, if you want to do this on a month to month basis and send me a clear copy of the receipts, I'll pay what I'm supposed to pay. But if you can't produce this stuff, don't ask me for it.

At the same time, after divorce, these same fathers no longer felt centrally involved in their children's daily lives. Their narratives reflect their sense of loss with respect to the daily contact. One father, for example, expressed his sense of loss by contrasting his parenting opportunities before and after divorce. Before divorce, he recounted:

Before the divorce, I mean, we were father and daughters. That's all there was to it. I mean, teach them to ride a bike, to going and playing on the playground with them, to taking rides on bikes, to you name it. I did it because they were basically my life outside of work . . . . Every night I carried them to bed and tucked them in, read them stories.
This father depicted a very different fathering role after his divorce when he described: "I don't think there's words to describe how bad it is. I don't think anybody could ever understand what a person goes through . . . . I can't parent. I cannot parent." The middle income fathers, therefore, perceive themselves as falling short, not only with respect to traditional visions, but of attaining the new cultural ideals of fathering as well.

The extreme tension that middle-income divorced fathers express with regard to the traditional family provider role and the more contemporary caregiving role is mirrored in the literature that chronicles the ambivalence that middle-income men often exhibit about gender equality in families. As Thompson and Walker (1989) report, the dual-career model of working families suggests that middle-class men are egalitarian. But much of the research evidence suggests that egalitarian attitudes may not necessarily translate into behavior. That is, these men have the most trouble sharing family provision with their wives (Fendrich, 1984). Moreover, Ferree (1984) found that in middle-class families, the size of husbands' earnings most often makes wives' earnings supplemental. It is easy in such families for husbands to view wives as secondary providers and to view wives' wage work as a privilege for wives rather than a contribution to the whole family. This attitude, in turn, can lead to ambivalent views toward allocation of responsibility for family caretaking roles.

In conclusion, as this analysis illustrates, gender ideology and social class interact to shape the symbolic meaning and enactment of the father role for these research participants after divorce. For both upper- and lower-income fathers there is a certain symmetry or synchrony between both aspects of the emerging cultural ideal of fatherhood.
For upper-income men, their successful provision of financial support paved the way for what some experienced as an enhanced involvement in the day-to-day caretaking of their children. For lower-income fathers, their limited ability to provide financially translated into blocked opportunities for close involvements with their children after divorce. And the picture for middle-class fathers vividly illustrates the struggle involved as contemporary families adapt to changing social trends and cultural ideals.

These middle-income fathers, in a sense, exemplify the struggle. During marriage, they were able, at least on the surface, to present an image of attaining the societal ideal of a hegemonic, yet "new" father operating with the context of the mythic "white middle-class" family. In this structure, they attain hegemony not so much from classic sources such as financial resources or actual social power, but rather from their status as head of a household that our society has endorsed as the ideal (Thorne, 1982). Thus, they experience their loss of this status as a particular blow, weakening their ability to exert their influence in a postdivorce context. This creates a significant tension between successfully enacting both the provider and caretaker role in their postdivorce families, and this tension in turn generates compelling frustrations. In other words, these middle-income fathers' relative descent in the masculinity/fatherhood hierarchy is perhaps the steepest of any of the income groups. The higher-income fathers, after all, appear to relatively successfully negotiate the divorce transition. And for their part, the lower-income group already was not achieving societal ideals of masculinity and fatherhood and thus their continued failure to do so after divorce does not cause a significant disruption in their self-constructions. It is therefore not accidental that expressions of anger and
resentment by middle-class men at "the system" and at their ex-wives were often the most vehement.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Connected Understandings: Divorce, Fatherhood, and Gender

By examining the connections between divorce and men's struggles over the meaning and practice of marriage and fatherhood, I take up larger questions about the social construction of gender and gender inequality in modern families. Developing an integrated understanding of divorce, fatherhood, and social constructions of gender enables us not only to explore and analyze each individual issue in its own right, but also to derive implications for theorizing the dynamic relationship between and among these complex social phenomena.

Divorce

With respect to divorce, existing research had discussed the tendency of divorce outcomes and adjustment processes to most often fall out along gender lines. Moreover, scholars have pointed to the gender differentiation in marriage that is made apparent at the point of divorce (Demo & Gaining, 1994; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). Yet there is a dearth of research targeting men (Dudley, 1991; Kruk, 1991; Marsiglio, 1995a). My study begins to address this critical gap in our knowledge.
As an initial matter, this study begins to expand our understanding of the divorce process by expanding the focus of the inquiry. Specifically, my analysis revolves around the uniquely gendered experience of men after divorce. Merely giving voice to the subjective experiences of men is itself an advance. Prior research efforts have most often drawn upon women's or children's experiences (Depner & Bray, 1990; Kitson & Holmes, 1992). Ultimately, with an understanding that accounts for and reflects all facets of the divorce experience, we can generate research that will be better able to aid families to more successfully negotiate this often stressful life transition.

Moreover, in this study, I have sought to enhance our understanding of divorce through a rigorous attention to theory. By laying a strong theoretical foundation, I can begin to build upon and draw connections between other pieces of knowledge about fathers' divorce adjustment that have evolved in a somewhat more fragmented manner. For example, research has documented the level of participation that divorced fathers maintain with their children after divorce, and has begun to develop explanations for why high levels of disengagement occur. Although these research efforts provide useful information, the findings often are represented in a somewhat fragmented manner with no underlying theory to connect the salient concepts. Thus, there still exists a need for a comprehensive theoretical account of fathers' postdivorce family experiences. In other words, utilizing a strong theoretical focus provides a point of connection to other works and can help us develop a more coherent understanding of divorce. Of particular relevance for this study, a theoretical focus grounded in feminist perspectives on gender provides a useful interpretive framework. In particular, gender theory can facilitate
connections between knowledge about the dynamics of fathers family commitments over the life course with an understanding of their sense of themselves as men (Marsiglio, 1995a). Moreover, approaching men's postdivorce experience with such a theoretical model opens up the examination of more explicit influences of dynamic gender relations, both during and after the marriage, on the divorce experience itself.

Finally, this study helps to enhance our understanding of divorce per se by incorporating other topics into our inquiries. Most naturally, I attempt to extend the understanding of families that emerges at the point of divorce back to the family dynamics during marriage. By understanding the social organization of marriage, we ultimately inform our understanding of divorce. Likewise, I reach out to consider issues such as social stratification, power, and control. These issues have not generally been featured centrally in our discourse in divorce research. In essence, then, I view divorce as a dynamic process that can best be thoroughly studied by avoiding an over-compartmentalized approach. Thus, to begin the process of both broadening and deepening our understanding of divorce, I am advocating and implementing in this study an expanding approach of examining all issues that bear on the divorce experience, including those that occur prior to divorce, such as gender relations of power in marriage.

In the same vein, it is necessary to assess the broader social contexts of divorce; I have done so in this study by exploring the interactive effects of gender and social class, specifying the ways in which they differentially pattern the postdivorce experience.
Given strong demographic trends in our society, the study of divorce necessarily also informs the more general study of fatherhood. The growing diversity of life course and residency patterns for men and children -- a trend attributable in no small part to increasing divorce rates -- have fostered a new awareness about fathers' roles (Marsiglio, 1995b). For example, today a decreasing proportion of children live in households with their biological fathers. This pattern translates into reconceptualized and expanding visions of who fathers are and what they do. Divorce, as a significant rupture point in family relations, provides a unique opportunity to examine these evolving family roles of fathers. Issues that may well have been submerged during marriage, become visible, and perhaps even dominant, through the divorce experience. Divorce research therefore offers an opportunity to gain important knowledge not only about divorce per se, but also about fatherhood more generally.

As the narrative data in this study amply illustrate, fathers during divorce are at a point where they may be reconsidering family patterns that they had taken for granted during marriage. This makes divorce an opportune moment to explore with men the meaning of fatherhood in their lives. Likewise, because in divorce fathers may not be as readily able to control the family situations that frame their relationships with their children, the divorce lens offers the potential to develop significant insights into a variety of different dimensions of paternal involvement -- such as providing financial resources; engaging in physical caretaking; and offering moral guidance. In sum, when studying fatherhood, as an institution and as a practice (Rich, 1976), researchers should consider
the ways in which paternal involvement is embedded within a larger social and cultural context.

**Gender**

The importance of developing connected understandings of the social phenomena addressed in this study is perhaps most apparent with respect to social constructions of gender. The study of fatherhood generally, and fatherhood in the context of divorce in particular, strongly informs the analysis of gender. Over the last two decades, feminist scholars have pointed out the need to expand conceptualizations of gender in families. Feminist approaches have focused on three specific themes, each of which this study addresses.

First, feminists emphasize the need to place families within the larger patriarchal social structure. Modern society is structured along gender lines, and those societal patterns exert an inevitable force in the structuring of family relations. Of course, while there often are continuities between the gender alignments in the broader social structure and within the family, there also are discontinuities. In either event, there is an interactive relationship that becomes highly visible in divorce. After all, the divorce experience compels families to interface on an intimate level with societal structures, most prominently, the legal system. By utilizing the divorce context, therefore, this study can begin to more fully develop gender as a central category of analysis in family studies.

Second, feminist scholars emphasize the need to explain the mechanisms underlying the reproduction of the conventional gender order, as well as those forces that compel gender change. This study, with its focus on men's constructions of masculinity in
response to changing family relations of gender power, is well positioned to theorize these opposing forces. In this study, for example, I examine the variations in men's postdivorce responses, chronicling both the establishment of dominant masculinities and the challenges to conventional gender arrangements.

Third, feminist theory embraces the complex and contradictory nature of gender. Individuals' creations of themselves as gendered seems to present an inherent struggle and ambivalence. These impacts are perhaps nowhere more visible than in the context of divorced fathers. For example, the men in this study were coping with an environment in which they, often for the first time, were unable to exert significant control over the outcomes -- be it of the divorce generally, or their relationship with their children. By turning an analytic eye on this pivotal transitional moment, this study is well positioned to advance our understanding of the complex web of gendered interrelationships that is spun across the family dynamic.

This study thus can offer contributions to an enhanced understanding of issues surrounding divorce, fatherhood, and the social construction of gender. But even more significant than the insights for any one area individually, is the synergistic effect of examining these issues collectively. Particularly through the feminist theoretical lens used in this study, it is important to focus on developing an integrated appreciation of the dynamic relationship among these topics. Only by doing so can we begin to truly understand each individually, and, even more important, make genuine inroads into a fuller understanding and appreciation of the social contexts that these social dynamics influence in an interrelated fashion.
Limitations of the Study

This study makes a unique contribution to the literature through its theoretically focused and integrated exploration of divorce, fatherhood, and the social construction of gender. It addresses and begins to fill important gaps in the foundation of knowledge in all of these areas. At the same time, however, this study has several limitations.

The relatively small, homogeneous nature of this study's sample is another constraint. All of the research participants are white, and reside in the same geographic region, Marion County, Ohio. These demographic attributes represent perhaps the most notable limitation of this study's sample. In particular, this study's theoretical framework suggests theorizing the interactive influences of gender, race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation on fathers' postdivorce experiences. The sample's limitations, however, permitted me to stratify only along a socioeconomic axis. This research thus was able to constructively theorize about influences of social class, and not other aspects of diversity. That analysis produced results suggesting that these components of diversity may be significant, and the homogeneity of the sample therefore operated as a limit on what promises to be an important area of future study.

In addition, beyond the constraints imposed by the nature of the research sample, this study's longitudinal design produced limited results and proved relatively unproductive. I had structured the study to allow for an examination of the dynamic nature of gender processes by studying these fathers over a relatively significant period of time -- that is, there was a three-year time period between the first and second interviews. Although the study theorized that gender relations would evolve over time, the data
obtained from the second interviews failed to generate significant new insights. Of course, this is not to say that these fathers did not experience any changes in their life circumstances; as reported above, there were such shifts, including such fundamental changes as shifts in custodial arrangements. Rather, what the longitudinal aspects of the study design failed to generate was any information bearing on men's shifting constructions of gender over time. Interestingly, there is a possible explanation for this phenomenon in the existing research. Ahrons and Miller (1993) conducted a longitudinal analysis and found that postdivorce families most often had reorganized and stabilized their patterns of interaction by the end of the first year following divorce. Here, the majority of fathers in the sample already had been divorced for over a year at the time of the first interviews, and so realigned family patterns already may have been firmly established. The second interviews accordingly merely picked up the same entrenched patterns.

Implications for Future Research and Theory Development

Perhaps the main finding of this feminist-informed exploration of fathers' postdivorce experiences is that divorce prompts a rupture in gender relations in families. In response to these shifting gender relations of power, fathers are provoked to reconstruct gender in their lives and in their family relationships. From the theoretical insights that emerge through this study's narrative data, future research can follow several distinct, but interrelated pathways. Each pathway independently holds the promise of providing avenues to ask, and begin to answer, additional questions, as well as to incorporate new and expanded theoretical perspectives. But as these various pathways are
pursued, it will be important to attempt to integrate the findings to advance a general understanding of the dynamics of divorce and the social construction of gender in families.

First, this study's findings suggest making gender a central category of analysis in future divorce research. Increased focus on gendered experiences as determinants of human behavior implies increased attention to the study of divorced men, particularly fathers. Conventionally, feminist scholars have emphasized the theoretical importance of placing women at the center of scholarly inquiry. Yet the ultimate goal of locating women at the center of inquiry is to transform the grounding of our discipline as a whole. That is, feminist scholarship ultimately seeks to "move beyond the woman-centered strategy to decipher the gendered basis of all social and cultural life, tracing the significance of gender organization and relations in all institutions and in shaping men's as well as women's lives" (Stacey & Thorne, 1985, p. 306). Future research, therefore, should continue to make men's voices central, creating a scholarly environment within which men as well as women are examined as explicitly gendered individuals.

Another pathway for future research is a natural extension of an increased focus on gender -- namely, an assessment of social structure. The theoretical contributions of this study, achieved by moving beyond the limitations inherent in viewing gender merely as a property of the individual (Stacey & Thorne, 1985; Connell, 1987), suggest focusing increased attention on social structure as well as individual experience. By doing so, thereby placing individual experience within its historical and political contexts, research can more fully attend to issues of power and conflict. Overall, such an expanded focus would lead to conceptualizations of the constitutive links between the micro and macro
levels of gender — that is, between personal practice and collective social arrangements. Collective social arrangements are produced by personal practice, and personal practice is shaped and constrained by the collective social arrangements within which they are embedded (Connell, 1987). To fully comprehend gender relations in families, these constitutive links must be more fully theorized.

Several related pathways for future research flow from this theoretical advance. For example, such a focus suggests the benefits of conducting research that analyzes both men's and women's experiences and allows them to be understood in relation to each other. Moreover, this type of comparative research approach should avoid creating binary oppositions between men and women, and refrain from conceptualizing masculinity and femininity as dichotomous. Rather, research informed by feminist theoretical tenets embraces continuity and seeks to make connections between men's and women's accounts and the wider social processes within which they are embedded.

Likewise, future research should examine the ways in which fathers' experiences reflect an interactive process of constructing gender not only in relation to women but also in relation to other men. Scholars have noted that studying men's and women's experiences in relation to one another is important because gender is an inherently relational construct (Ferree, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). That is, masculinity and femininity are best understood as constructed in relation to one another. The findings of this study, moreover, suggest that fathers not only construct masculinity in relation to, or in opposition to, women's expressions of femininity, but also in relation to other masculinities. Future research should build on this foundation.
Another direction for future research centers on exploring more fully the ways in which fathers' experiences are differentially patterned on the basis of stratification systems other than socioeconomic status. That is, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation all must play a more central role in research and theorizing on fathers, generally, and divorced fathers, in particular. This study was able to begin the process of incorporating a recognition of such diversities by assessing the ways in which social class influenced men's postdivorce gender constructions. Evaluating the influences of other variables, both individually and collectively, and studying different populations, should allow us to build a body of research that is more cumulative, inclusive, and complete.

Another pathway for future research is to attempt to explain the processes through which different constructions of gender attain preeminence at different temporal stages in the divorce adjustment process through longitudinal research. Gender relations are dynamic, and likely change over time. This study attempted to incorporate such a longitudinal component, but as noted above, failed to generate useful data. Renewed efforts, perhaps capturing more fully the entire time spectrum -- i.e., during the marriage, during the divorce process, postdivorce, and in remarriage -- are necessary.

Indeed, in a related pathway, pursuing such a longitudinal element can be seen as an aspect of avoiding over compartmentalization. There are benefits of studying marriage from the perspective of the divorced (Pyke 1994). Feminist researchers argue that the oppressiveness nature of certain "normal" institutionalized patterns of behavior can become apparent at rupture points caused by external forces or family crises (Mies, 1983). Divorce creates such a rupture, leading to a raised consciousness about marriage. Thus,
studying divorce helps enhance our knowledge of marriage. Future research can draw upon such interrelations, and extend our knowledge about the dynamic nature of gender relations, by studying across an entire spectrum of topics. Just as gender relations in marriage influence fathers' reactions to divorce, so too may they impact adjustment to remarriage. Further studies should be aware of, and account for, such linkages.

Finally, another pathway for improving future research focuses on enhancing our methodological approaches. This study has demonstrated the value of using a theoretically grounded qualitative model. Additional studies can consider questions about men's and women's postdivorce experience using a multi-method approach to research. There may be significant advantages to applying a variety of methodological tools and strategies; a methodological model that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches has the ability to build upon existing work and develop even fuller accounts of the dynamics of individuals' postdivorce adaptations. Kurz' (1995) research on mothers' divorce experiences provides an exemplar of such an approach. Her study used a representative sample and thus is on relatively strong ground in making generalizations. Moreover, in addition to the intensive interview data, Kurz' study quantifies key variables and statistically tests hypothetical relationships (Yllo, 1997). Such an integrated and rigorous methodological approach holds the promise to effectively weave together relevant quantitative data with research participants' own voices.
Implications for Research Methodologies

This study allows for an exploration of the inherent challenges posed by conducting feminist research on men. In this context, the tensions embedded within feminist methodological approaches (Catlett, 1997) become apparent. In particular, qualitative research grounded in feminist-informed methodologies seeks to give voice to research participants (Smith, 1987; Thompson, 1992). At the same time, by placing too great a focus on merely giving voice to individual experience, qualitative research risks doing only that, thus limiting its ability to go beyond the world of experience to reveal something of the wider social processes that pervade men's and women's lives (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983; Gorelick, 1991). This presents an inherent tension for feminist researchers. That is, feminists hold a political vision and theoretical grounding that obliges scholars to take responsibility for interpretation and analysis (Risman, 1993), even if that interpretation differs from research participants intentions (Borland, 1991). Although this methodological tension must be negotiated in all research projects, it is particularly relevant in feminist research on men.

These tensions inherent in feminist research plainly were experienced in this study. In addition, methodological issues also emanated from the nature of the topic and from the manner in which the interviews were conducted. These factors were exhibited in this study in three distinct ways.

First, in the process of collecting this research data, I developed a connected relationship with the participants in this study. This type of responsive connection is central to feminist epistemology (Thompson, 1992). Yet as time passed, and I moved
from data collection to data analysis and writing, I found that I developed a distance from the research participants. This detachment, in turn, allowed me to more readily apply my own feminist perspective to the narrative data. The resulting interpretations, I suspect, would not be directly accepted by all the research participants as accurate encapsulations of their intent or perspectives. While I did not want to become a captive mouthpiece for these fathers' own viewpoints, I also did not want to impose my own views to the point that the research participants' voices could not be heard. As a result of my reflexive process about this tension, I used the fathers' narratives fully and liberally in drawing my theoretical conclusions, ensuring that I stayed as close to their voices as possible.

Second, as I have discussed, there were significant tensions -- and often outright contradictions -- in several of the men's accounts of their marriages. Of course, some measure of inconsistency is to be expected. These interviews, after all, were retrospective accounts, and the participants can be expected to engage in active reconstructions. This phenomenon, however, has potentially significant implications for research methodology. In particular, it puts a premium on an interactive interview approach, in which the interview does not merely record responses to pre-ordained questions, but probes and follows up to ensure that a full account is developed. Such an approach will be especially necessary where extant research suggests that initial inquiries will obtain incomplete information. For example, because this and other research suggest that men may tend to overstate their domestic involvement (Hochschild, 1989), it is necessary to take a full investigative approach to questioning in this area. And in order to accurately anticipate those areas in which such a probing approach will be most necessary, the research
methodology should ensure an early grounding in existing work so that the tendencies that research suggests will be present in the interviewing process are identified.

Finally, this study was implemented through use of a research team. Specifically, the initial interviews of the research participants were conducted by three different researchers, although I conducted all of the follow-up interviews. This fact in and of itself has methodological implications. The other two interviewers did not fully share my theoretical or political grounding. Indeed, the data being collected in the interviews were being used by the other research team members for research projects with a very different focus. All of the interviewers, of course, were following a shared interview guide to ensure that the necessary domains of interest were covered. But as discussed above, there often was a need to probe, and the different perspectives and research interests of the interviewers may have impacted the extent to which this was accomplished. I saw this issue emerging as I reviewed the first round of interviews and was able to fully address it in the follow-up sessions. While it therefore presented little obstacle to my work in this study, this phenomenon poses a broader issue that will need to be negotiated in any qualitative research project accomplished through a research team.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The feminist theoretical analysis developed in this study identifies shifting gender relations of power as a central influence on fathers' postdivorce adaptations. Fundamentally, divorce creates significant changes in the organization of a family system. The ways in which fathers respond to these changes are shaped by a number of factors related to how they define themselves as men, as well as the broader social context in
which they operate. For example, McKenry and Price (1990) contend that because of their traditional gender role socialization, men are at risk for many negative consequences of divorce. Moreover, men's ability to adapt to the changing circumstances that accompany divorce may be hindered because most men lack the societal supports for moving beyond the traditional gender polarization that often organizes families and defines masculinity and femininity (Fox & Blanton, 1995). For most fathers, therefore, the family changes prompted by divorce signify losses in terms of family power and control, as well as in terms of authority over and influence in their children's lives. This conceptualization of fathers' divorce experience has implications for, and offers potential insights to, both family practitioners and policymakers.

For practitioners, their psychoeducational and therapeutic interventions should help fathers become aware of, and sensitive to, issues of gender and power. Therapists, therefore, could help fathers identify and specify their feelings of powerlessness and anger, and furthermore, to help them utilize their enhanced self-awareness to develop constructive ways of handling their often intense emotional reactivity. In essence, therapeutic interventions should be designed to help fathers renegotiate their sense of themselves as men so that they no longer equate masculinity with dominance over their wives and children. An important element of this type of intervention is encouraging fathers to focus on the personal connections and responsibilities that fathering entails.

Practitioners also should devise interventions that focus on actively engaging the agency and capacity of men who are experiencing the negative consequences of divorce. The rupture point of divorce can lead to positive opportunities for men in families;
essentially, divorce creates, and to some extent necessitates, opportunities for both men and women to deal in new ways with family roles and relationships. By recognizing this potential, practitioners can develop approaches to service delivery that will promote the well-being of fathers, mothers, and children. In particular, the well-being of all family members ultimately depends on both parents' ability to equitably reap the benefits and share the responsibilities of all aspects of family life.

A focus on the gendered nature of the divorce experience also has clear policy implications. Too often, policies that pertain to divorce are based on a patriarchal family model. As a result, such policies intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate gender-structured family roles in which women's economic dependence is perpetuated (Catlett & McKenry, 1996) and men's marginal involvement in family caregiving is reproduced. Although such policies may solve divorce-related family problems in the short term (i.e., support mothers' parenting through the provision of financial support), they fundamentally fail to address the long-term problems and inequities associated with gender polarization in families. This study suggests that changes in the legal system are needed to more effectively promote mothers' and fathers' cooperation and continued coparenting after divorce. Strategies for supporting fathers' postdivorce involvement in coparenting, in particular, need to be implemented in the contexts of the legal system, as well as the mental health system. For example, postdivorce father-child relationships could be facilitated and enhanced through more explicitly liberal visitation arrangements, better enforcement of existing arrangements, and joint custody arrangements (Arditti, 1991; Ferreiro, 1990).
This is not to say, however, that policies promoting postdivorce father-child relationships through liberal visitation and presumption of joint custody are a panacea. Indeed, such policy approaches must be carefully considered because of the potential threat that they pose for mothers' rights and interests. For example, those who favor joint custody claim that this custody arrangement makes a powerful symbolic statement that fathers should share parenting after divorce, thereby helping to further the idea of gender-neutral family roles, that in turn will encourage shared parenting (Kurz, 1995). But groups representing women's interests have a different set of concerns about mothers' and fathers' roles after divorce. Some feminists, for instance, are suspect of any automatic increase in fathers' influence over custody and visitation. They claim that parents can have serious conflicts during and after divorce, and that, as part of such conflicts, fathers may use custody as a tool of harassment (Fineman, 1991). Some advocates for women have identified a particular form of harassment they call "custody blackmail" in which fathers can threaten to sue for custody, even when they do not want it, in order to bargain for lower spousal and child support awards (Kurz, 1995).

For all of these reasons, divorce policies must be carefully evaluated on a case-by-case basis prior to implementation. Indeed, until postdivorce families reorganize around issues of power and emotional connectedness (Fox & Blanton, 1995), it is important to consider the context of parenting patterns prior to separation in negotiating postdivorce parenting arrangements. But as parents' decisions about the extent of their own involvement develop and change, divorce and custody policies should allow for evolution...
in the structure of postdivorce parenting. At the same time, as Czапanskiy (1991) argues, increased rights for fathers must go hand in hand with increased responsibilities.
APPENDIX A

Human Subjects Approvals
Research Involving Human Subjects

ACTION OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE

With regard to the employment of human subjects in the proposed research protocol:

9400120 INFLUENCES ON NONCUSTODIAL FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT WITH THEIR CHILDREN FOLLOWING DIVORCE, Patrick C. McKenry, Beth S. Catlett, Family Relations and Human Development

THE BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES REVIEW COMMITTEE HAS TAKEN THE FOLLOWING ACTION:

- APPROVED
- DISAPPROVED
- APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS
- WAIVER OF WRITTEN CONSENT GRANTED

* Conditions stated by the Committee have been met by the investigator and, therefore, the protocol is APPROVED.

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to retain a copy of each signed consent form for at least three (3) years beyond the termination of the subject's participation in the proposed activity. Should the principal investigator leave the University, signed consent forms are to be transferred to the Human Subjects Review Committee for the required retention period. This application has been approved for the period of one year. You are reminded that you must promptly report any problems to the Review Committee, and that no procedural changes may be made without prior review and approval. You are also reminded that the identity of the research participants must be kept confidential.

Date: April 22, 1994

Signed: [Signature]

(Co-chairperson)
Research Involving Human Subjects

**ACTION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

With regard to the employment of human subjects in the proposed research protocol:

**94B0120** INFLUENCES ON NONCUSTODIAL FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT WITH THEIR CHILDREN FOLLOWING A DIVORCE. Patrick C. McKenry, Family Relations and Human Development

THE BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES HUMAN SUBJECTS IRB HAS TAKEN THE FOLLOWING ACTION:

- [X] APPROVED
- [ ] DISAPPROVED
- [ ] APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS*
- [ ] WAIVER OF WRITTEN CONSENT GRANTED

* Conditions stated by the IRB have been met by the investigator and, therefore, the protocol is approved.

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to retain a copy of each signed consent form for at least three (3) years beyond the termination of the subject's participation in the proposed activity. Should the principal investigator leave the University, signed consent forms are to be transferred to the Human Subjects IRB for the required retention period. This application has been approved for the period of one year. You are reminded that you must promptly report any problems to the IRB, and that no procedural changes may be made without prior review and approval. You are also reminded that the identity of the research participants must be kept confidential.

Date: November 6, 1996

Signed: Patricia McKenry
APPENDIX B

Written Communications to Research Participants
September 13, 1994

Mr._________
___________, OH 43342

Dear Mr._________

I am a researcher from the Ohio State University, and I am interested in studying the experiences of nonresidential fathers since the time of their divorce. Much has been written about the experiences of mothers and children after divorce, but very little from the father's perspective. As a divorced father, the information that you can provide us would be very helpful in filling some of these gaps in the research literature and would help in the development of policies and programs to assist fathers in the divorce process.

Your name was obtained from the Marion County P.E.A.C.E. program. Your participation in our project would involve a two-hour interview with either me or one of my co-investigators (Ms. Kathy Clark or Ms. Beth Catlett). Your participation in our study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate in the study, we would be asking questions about how you have been doing since the time of your divorce and more specifically questions about the relationship you now have with your child(ren). You may find some of the questions somewhat personal or stressful. However, you are free to refuse to answer any questions that you find objectionable, or to withdraw from the study at any time. Please be assured that your responses will be held completely confidential; no names will ever be associated with the responses. The report of the research findings will be in summary form, reflecting the general responses of all the fathers in the study.

One of us will be calling you in the next week to determine your interest in this project and to answer any questions you might have about the study. In return for your participation, we will provide you with a small token of our appreciation -- a gift certificate to a local restaurant.
Your consideration of this request is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Patrick C. McKenry, PhD
Professor
Dear 

You were interviewed two years ago by a researcher from the Ohio State University as part of a study on nonresidential fathers after divorce who participated in the Marion County PEACE program. Thank you for your participation; your interview has been an essential part of the study and has already begun to fill important gaps in our knowledge about divorced fathers.

As part of this ongoing research, we would like to follow-up by conducting a brief interview to explore how you have been doing since the last time we talked. To do so, I will be asking you questions about changes you have experienced, as well as about how your relationship with your children and former spouse has progressed. Your participation in this follow-up interview will involve approximately 30-45 minutes of your time and can be scheduled at your convenience. As we assured you when you agreed to participate in the first phase of this research, all your responses will be held completely confidential. In fact, no names will be associated with the responses, and reports of the research will be in summary form, reflecting the general responses of all the fathers in the study. Moreover, you are free to refuse to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable, as well as to withdraw from the study at any time.

I will be calling you within the next few weeks to determine your availability and to answer any questions you might have. I will look forward to speaking with you soon. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Beth Skilken Catlett, M.S.
Research Associate
APPENDIX C

Demographic Questionnaire
DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

1. How old were you on your last birthday?

2. What is your race?
   ___ White
   ___ African-American (Black)
   ___ Asian-American
   ___ Hispanic
   ___ Native American
   ___ Other (please specify)

3. What are the ages of your children?
   Boys: ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
   Girls: ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

4. What is your current marital status?
   ___ Divorced, Single
   ___ Divorced, Cohabitating
   ___ Separated
   ___ Remarried

   If not cohabiting or married, are you dating someone?
   ___ Yes
   ___ No

   What is your wife's marital status?
   ___ Divorced Single
   ___ Divorced, Cohabitating
   ___ Remarried

   If not cohabiting or married, is she dating someone?
   ___ Yes
   ___ No

5. How many years of education have you completed?
   ___ less than the 9th grade
   ___ 9-12th grade
   ___ high school diploma
___ post high school vocational or technical training
___ 1-2 years of college
___ 3-4 years of college
___ college degree
___ graduate degree (Specify ______________________)

6. What is your occupation? ______________________
   What are your job duties? ______________________

7. a. What is your gross income from all sources? _______________
   b. How would you evaluate your current financial situation?
      ___ very well off
      ___ fairly well off
      ___ doing ok
      ___ somewhat problematic
      ___ very problematic

8. Please think about your divorce.

   How old were you when you married? _______
   How long did that marriage last? _______
   How many children did you have? _______
   How long have you been divorced? _______

9. What method did you use to end your previous marriage:
   ___ Dissolution
   ___ Divorce

10. Was this your first marriage?
    ___ Yes
    ___ No

   If no, how many times were you married before this marriage?
   ______

11. How would you characterize your relationship with your children prior to the divorce?

    ___ Very close
    ___ Somewhat close
    ___ Mixed
    ___ Not very close
    ___ Distant, not close at all

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12. About how many miles away from here do your children live? (actual or estimated miles) _______

13. During the past month, about how often did you talk on the telephone or send your child(ren) a letter?
   ___ not at all
   ___ once
   ___ twice
   ___ three or four times
   ___ more than 4 times

14. During the past month, about how often did you see your child(ren)?
   ___ not at all
   ___ once
   ___ twice
   ___ three or four times
   ___ more than four times

15. How many days did your child(ren) visit or live with you during the past month?
   ___ none
   ___ 1
   ___ 2
   ___ 3
   ___ 4
   ___ 5-7
   ___ 8-14
   ___ 15-19
   ___ 20-24
   ___ 25-31

16. How much influence do you have in making major decisions about such things as education, religion and health care of your children? Do you have:
   ___ none
   ___ some
   ___ a great deal of influence
17. Overall, how satisfied are you with the current situation in each of the following areas:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Where child lives</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Your control with child(ren)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Your contributions to child support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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18. What were the terms of your financial agreement with your former spouse?
   Alimony? _________________________________________________________
   Child support? _________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

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APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Guides
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How often do you see your children?
   Probes:
   --What are the terms of the visitation agreement?
   --How often do you actually visit
   --Changed since the divorce? Better, worse?
   --Would you like to spend more time with your children?
   --Barriers to visitation?

2. What activities do you and your child(ren) participate in?
   Probes:
   --leisure activities such as picnics, movies, sports
   --talking, working on project, playing together
   --religious activities
   --school activities or other organized activities

3. How is your relationship with your children going?
   Probes:
   --Satisfied with the relationship?
   --Children satisfied?
   --How could it be improved? Obstacles?
   --How former spouse might describe you as a parent?

4. How important would you say the parental role is for you?
   Probes:
   --Do you feel you are an important influence?
   --Rank job, parent, spouse role
   --Changed since the divorce?

5. How would you characterize your style of parenting?
   Probes:
   --Goals for your children?
   --Influences on your particular way of parenting?
   --Relationship with your father?

6. Does your involvement with your children involve other members of your family?
   Probes:
   --Who?
   --Does their involvement influence your relationship with your children? How?
   --Do other people help you maintain the relationship you have with your children?
   Who? How?
7. Is your relationship different with each of your children?  
**Probes:**  
--Do you connect better with sons or daughters?  
--Does age make a difference?  

8. In general, how would you describe your involvement with and your relationship with your children when you were married?  
**Probes:**  
--How involved in care of children?  
--Primary responsibility  
--Who was primary parent?  
--To what extent did wife work outside of home?  
--Activities with children?  
--How did you and wife divide household responsibilities?  
--How react to news of divorce?  

9. Are you remarried, living with someone, or dating someone?  
**Probes:**  
--How does this affect relationship with your children?  
--How does she feel about the children?  
--Is anyone else living in your household?  

10. To what extent do you experience conflict with your child's mother over the parenting of your child(ren)?  
**Probes:**  
--Areas of conflict: (1) where child lives, (2) how child(ren) are raised, (3) how child's mother spends money on children), (4) your visits with the children, and (5) your contribution to the child(ren)'s support  
--How generally characterize relationship with former spouse?  
--Has your relationship with child(ren) is mother affected relationship with children?  
--Feelings about your former spouse as a mother?  

11. How much conflict do you experience with your child's mother during your marriage and during the divorce?  
**Probes:**  
--Similar to that experienced now?  
--Sources of conflict?
12. How do you feel about the settlement agreement worked out by you and your former spouse?  
Probes:  
--Fair?  
--Adequate visitation?  

13. Has your financial agreement changed since the time of divorce?  
Probes:  
--Child support?  
--Alimony?  
--Paid regularly?  
--Former spouse satisfied with amount of support?  
--If it has changed, what caused the change?  

14. In general, how have you felt since the time of your divorce?  
--Depression?  
--Loneliness?  
--Anger/Hostility?  
--Who has been helpful to you? (formal and informal sources)  

15. How do you think you were treated by the legal system when you obtained your divorce?  
Probes:  
--Attorneys?  
--judges?  
--Social services?  
--What services would have been helpful.  
--Suggestions for improvement?  

16. How do you feel about divorce in general?  
Probes:  
--Religious influence?  
--Morally wrong?  
--Any positives?  
--Feeling of personal responsibility?  
--How do men in general fare in divorce?  

17. How would evaluate the helpfulness of the PEACE Program?  
Probes:  
--Suggestions for improvement?
INTERVIEW GUIDE
(Second Interview)

1. Demographic Background Questions
   a. What is your current marital status?
   b. If not cohabiting or married, are you dating someone?
   c. Do you have step-children?
   d. What is your former wife's marital status?
   e. Has your occupation changed since we last talked?
   f. Has your income changed since we last talked?
   g. Have you or your children moved since we last talked? How many miles from you do your children currently live?

2. What has changed for you since the last time we talked?
   Probes:
   --How has your relationship with your children developed?
   --How are things going between you and your former wife? To what extent are you experiencing conflict?
   --Do you feel you are an important influence in your children's lives?

3. Have you returned to court since we last talked?
   Probes:
   --How do you feel you were treated by the legal system?
   --Have the terms of your custody agreement changed?
   --Have the terms of your financial agreement changed?
   --If you have experienced changes, how do you feel about them?

4. Tell me about the new relationships in your life.
   Probes:
   --(If remarried) How have you done things differently in this marriage?
   --(If dating) How is this relationship going?
   --How are your relationships with your step-children?
   --How do your relationships with your step-children compare to your relationships with your biological children?
LIST OF REFERENCES


