



Smith ScholarWorks

Theses, Dissertations, and Projects

2007

Nonresidential fathers' perceptions of the influence of their acrimonious divorces on their relationships with their children

Rachel Hava Green

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Green, Rachel Hava, "Nonresidential fathers' perceptions of the influence of their acrimonious divorces on their relationships with their children" (2007). Masters Thesis, Smith College, Northampton, MA.
<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/1332>

This Masters Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, and Projects by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@smith.edu.

Rachel Green
Nonresidential Fathers' Perceptions
of the Influence of Their
Acrimonious Divorces on Their
Relationships with Their Children

ABSTRACT

This qualitative, exploratory study looked at nonresidential fathers' perceptions of the influence of their acrimonious divorces on their relationships with their children. For the purpose of this study, the term nonresidential fathers referred to fathers of biological or adopted children who were no longer living in their children's homes due to divorce.

Twelve nonresidential fathers were interviewed in February and March of 2007. All of the men were recruited from the email listserv of the Pennsylvania chapter of Fathers' & Children's Equality, Inc. In an hour and a half interview, they answered 11 guiding questions which were all recorded on a digital recorder and then transcribed.

The study found that fathers believed two major aspects of divorce that influenced their relationships with their children: the acrimonious actions taken by their ex wives and their overall experiences with the judicial system throughout the divorce and child custody processes harmed their ability to be fathers. Past research supported findings, although future research on nonresidential fathers and their relationship with their children is still needed.

**NONRESIDENTIAL FATHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE INFLUENCE OF
THEIR ACRIMONIOUS DIVORCES ON THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH
THEIR CHILDREN**

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Social Work.

Rachel Green

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who helped me through this thesis process: Fathers' & Children's Equality, Inc. for your support and confidence in my project, the 12 participants who changed their schedules and commuted to take part in the interviews, and Yoosun Park, my thesis advisor, who provided me with valuable insights and continually steered me towards a higher level learning.

Tierra, I dedicate the act of completing my thesis to you, and I will never forget our many hours spent together in the library!

Michael, for reading and editing the oh-so many drafts of my thesis. Your love, support, and generosity made this process manageable. Thank you for being you, and loving me.

Mom and Dad without your support, financially and emotionally, I would not have been fortunate enough to be where I am today, a soon to be masters student. Thank you for the faith and encouragement, it means more to me...than I can put into words! You were both an integral part in the completion of my thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	3
III. METHODOLOGY.....	25
IV. FINDINGS.....	30
V. DISCUSSION.....	48
REFERENCES.....	55
APPENDIXES	
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter.....	59
Appendix B: Informed Consent.....	61
Appendix C: Demographic Information.....	63
Appendix D: Interview Questions.....	65
Appendix E: Referral List.....	66
Appendix F: Human Subjects Review Approval Letter.....	67

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Divorce is a topic that has been studied extensively, but the majority of the research has been conducted from women's, especially mothers' points of view. Recent literature has begun to examine the issue of divorce through the lens of fathers, including the effects of remaining in a conflictual relationship with an ex spouse (Dudley, 1991; Arendell, 1992), the amount and quality of contact between children and their nonresidential father (Arendell, 1992; Arditti, 1995), and the role identity of a nonresidential father (Madden-Derdich & Leanard, 2000).

However, more research needs to be done in this area in order to better understand the experience of fathers in relation to not only the dissolution of marriage, but also the dissolution of family. This study focuses on nonresidential fathers' perceptions of the influence of divorce, in the case where the father considers the divorce to have been acrimonious on their relationship with their children. For the purpose of this study, the term nonresidential fathers refer to fathers of biological or adopted children who are no longer living in their children's home due to divorce. Additionally divorce process, for the purpose of the study, also includes the two parties filing and fighting for custody and support of their children.

The participants in this study were part of the Pennsylvania chapter of Fathers' & Children's Equality, Inc. This organization is comprised of advocates for both parents to have equal access to their children and self help groups for nonresidential fathers. The

target population, recruited from the organization database, were nonresidential fathers who had at least one child between the ages of six and 12. Their children were either biological or adopted, and the fathers needed to have at least joint legal custody and partial physical custody. Their divorce proceedings were completed between 2000 and 2005. These 12 nonresidential fathers were interviewed in February and March of 2007.

Through the analysis of the 12 interviews, seen through the lens of family system's theory as the importance of homeostasis, the following chapters will look at the impact of an acrimonious divorce on the father's relationship with his children. This study will include an analysis of prior research studies which are primarily studies focused on divorce from the father's point of view. The final chapter will examine whether this study exhibits any correlation to prior research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a greater understanding of how nonresidential fathers perceive their relationships with their children after a divorce. When a father becomes nonresidential he can go through the process of coping with “diminished relationships with his children, disruption of his customary living experiences, loneliness and self blame for the failed marriage, and custody and visitation conflicts” (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004, p. 41). It is important to understand, from a nonresidential father’s point of view, how all of these experiences impact his relationship with his children.

The beginning of this chapter will briefly describe family systems theory, which is helpful to understanding families with difficulties. The points outlined in this section will lay the groundwork for understanding the importance of studying divorce from both the father’s and the mother’s points of view. Although there has been much research on divorce, the majority of it has been from the mother’s point of view. Research from the father’s point of view is a new area of study (Kruk, 1994; Arditti, 1995). This chapter will illustrate some of the main areas of this new research being conducted with nonresidential fathers. A section on legal issues affecting divorce proceedings that indirectly impact the father-child relationship as well as the ex-partners’ relationships with one another, follows this chapter. The remaining portion of this chapter will look at issues related to contact between a nonresidential father and his children, factors which

may prevent contact, and role identity issues of a nonresidential father. This chapter will conclude with a look at the meaning of all the research, limitations of existing research, as well as the implications of this research for clinicians working with families.

Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory was derived from systems theory. The concept behind systems theory is that every system, including a family, is a subsystem of a larger system. These subsystems emerge from interactions and relationships among individuals (Nichols & Schwartz, 2006). More specifically, a family is a subsystem made up of various relationships within the family, which then interact with subsystems outside of the family. Family systems theory does not look at an individual or families in an isolated manner (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004).

Homeostasis is a term that comes from systems theory. This is a self-regulatory process which keeps systems in balance (Nichols & Schwartz, 2006). Within family systems theory, homeostasis refers to “those internal, ongoing, sustaining, dynamically interactional processes that take place within a family and help assure internal balance” (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004, p. 77). In an intact family, the leadership roles are in the spousal subsystem, which is a subsystem made up of clear boundaries, which enables the children to interact with the parents but remain separate from their previously established subsystem (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). Then there is the parental subsystem which focuses on the needs of the family, which includes the children. There are flexible boundaries within these two subsystems which allows for families to handle crises and return to homeostasis (Durst, Wedemeyer, & Zurcher, 1985).

One experience that can disrupt homeostasis is divorce. After divorce, it is the family's job to attempt to restore the family balance if possible. In some families that cannot restore balance their system "dissolves." The result of this is the end of the relationship between the partners and between the father and children (Durst et al., 1985). Arendell (1992) writes, "What men do in response to divorce directly affects their children and former wives as well as themselves, and thus has resonance for understanding family processes and transitions" (p. 562). Families whose homeostasis cannot be restored typically go through the most changes and are in need of the most help.

Triangulation

An area of focus within family system theory is the emotional tension within an individual or in a person's relationship. One way to diffuse the tension between two people is to triangulate. This is the process of drawing in a family member to form a three-person interaction. This occurs when the stability of the couple or situation is threatened. At that point the couple will involve a vulnerable person (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). An example of this is when two feuding parents involve their children in their problems. The couple may "reach out and pull in the other person, the emotions may overflow to the third person, or that person may be emotionally programmed to initiate involvement" (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004, p. 191). When the anxiety becomes too intense, the triangle may no longer be able to hold the tension: "Triangulation lets off steam but freezes conflict in place" (Nichols & Schwartz, 2006, p. 118). At that point, the systems bring in more people, becoming a "series of interlocking" triangles (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). This spillover during a

divorce can involve lawyers, judges, family friends, and others who can possibly get triangulated into the divorcing couple's conflict. Depending on how the parents are able to interact during both the legal process of the divorce and the child custody decisions, their behaviors can affect the amount of triangulation that takes place as well as determine the likelihood of whether or not homeostasis is possible. The outcome of this process can greatly affect the post divorce family system.

Legal Issues That Take Place During Divorce Proceedings

Nonresidential fathers are men “whose rights and obligations as fathers are curtailed and reassigned through judicial action, usually accompanying marital separation or divorce” (Fox & Blanton, 1995, p. 258). The legal parameters that determine what a nonresidential father is, are determined by state law, judicial discretion, case precedent, and federal statutes. What it means to be a nonresidential father on a personal scale is determined by family members, custody dispositions, visitation privileges, and child support (Fox & Blanton, 1995). The rights of the father, amount of contact, and relationship a father will have with his ex-partner and eventually with his children are in some ways determined by the type of custody a father is granted, amount of visitation time, and the monetary sum of his monthly child support. One of the reasons these are all determinants is because the actions between parents during this process as well as whether both parties agree with the outcome will all determine whether homeostasis is possible. The more parents do not agree, the more likely post divorce family subsystems will dissolve.

Legal and Physical Custody

There are two forms of custody: legal and physical. Legal custody is the right of a parent to make decisions regarding his or her child (Seltzer, 1998). Physical custody is when a person has the right to have their child in a residential setting, such as overnight visits (Fox & Blanton, 1995). Visitation time is an opportunity that allows a nonresidential father the ability to “maintain some semblance of a paternal relationship with his child or children” (Fox & Blanton, 1995, p. 262).

Both physical and legal custody are arranged and determined during the divorce settlement. Arrangements for physical custody vary in the amount of contact time that is awarded, as well as the specific types of arrangements. Fox and Blanton write “A blanket ‘right of reasonable visitation’ is often granted, leaving the determination and implementation of that right in the hands of the divorcing parents” (1995, p. 262). Unfortunately there has been little research done on how successfully both parents work out the visitation arrangements. Other research found in the “factors preventing contact” portion of this literature review may better explain reasons why this type of arrangement may not work (Fox & Blanton, 1995).

Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) conducted a study that looked at 1,100 families in California who filed for divorce between the years of 1984 and 1985 (p. 13). Their studies focused on the 933 families whose divorces were finalized in 1989. The study found 198 divorces which were conflictual, in that they were contested by at least one parent. Out of those 198, there were 117 cases in which the mother requested and was granted sole custody, and only 52 cases in which the father requested and was granted sole custody. In the 29 other cases the judge granted a compromise. The situation that

caused the most conflict was when the mother requested sole physical custody and the father requested joint custody. In 67% of those cases, mothers were granted their requests. Lastly, Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) found that the likelihood of the partners receiving joint custody was higher when both partners had legal representation.

Seltzer (1990) has also looked at custody outcomes. Her research showed that joint custody is more likely if the father's income was higher. She also found that the mother was more likely to receive physical custody if the children were younger. Seltzer reported that 73% of divorce cases end with the mother being awarded sole legal and physical custody. However, she also found that 35 states prefer to award joint custody.

Child Support

The amount of child support a judge orders varies from family-to-family, and according to Krause (1990), in a historical look at child support, posited that the majority of fathers who were ordered to pay child support, have not done so. The Family Support Act of 1988 is a federal law designed to increase the chances that a mother would receive child support from her ex-partner. The act also included factors that determine the amount of child support one parent will be ordered to pay another. One type of factor is a "need" factor which includes the "number and ages of children, and custodial parent's employment status and income" (Fox & Blanton, 1995, p. 266). There are also "ability-to-pay factors," which examine the income levels of the nonresidential fathers.

Negotiating and bargaining powers of the parents and lawyers are not thought to be significant in child support decisions (Fox & Blanton). The role that child support plays in determining the amount of contact a nonresidential father receives with his children is discussed in other parts of this literature review.

Contact between Children and Nonresidential Father

There have been many studies conducted on the amount of contact between children and their nonresidential fathers. Researchers have found that fathers tend to decrease the amount of contact with their children as more time lapses from the divorce (Arendell, 1992; Arditti, 1995). Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1976) found that disengagement between nonresidential fathers and their children begins shortly after the parents separate and after a year the level of contact drops considerably. There is also evidence that nonresidential fathers have a greater involvement with their children if their children are sons rather than daughters (Marsiglio, 1991). Mostly, other researchers feel that there is mixed evidence on this findings (Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, and Zill, 1983; Seltzer, 1991).

Kruk (1994), found that of the 40 nonresidential fathers interviewed for this study, more than half lose contact with their children after divorce, and were more likely to do so when they had close relationships with their children prior to divorce. A study conducted by Furstenberg, et al.(1983), found that 52% of their sample of 1, 682 children, had no contact with their fathers in the past year, while 33.33% maintained monthly or more contact. In 1994, King looked at the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) and found that 27% of children four years and older saw their nonresidential fathers once a week, and 31% had no contact. There have been many studies conducted, with a focus on the reasons for a decrease in contact, which will be looked at throughout this chapter.

Differences by race

Research in this area regarding specific races is limited. There have been studies that illustrate that the amount of time African American nonresidential fathers and the amount of time Caucasian fathers spend with their children differs. One study (Seltzer, 1991) found that African American fathers visit their children more frequently than do Caucasian fathers. Pleck's (1997) analysis of the National Longitudinal Study found that the accessibility, fathers who are available and have access to see their children, of nonresidential fathers is lower among African American fathers, but among the fathers who are accessible, African American fathers are more likely to visit their children and participate in childrearing decisions than non-African American nonresidential fathers (Seltzer, 1991). Conversely, Seltzer and Bianchi (1998) found in two different studies that Hispanic nonresidential fathers were most likely to never visit their children compared to fathers from other races in the study.

Education

It does not appear that the level of education of a nonresidential father has ever been a focus of a study, but it has been touched upon in a few studies in regards to demographic information. It has consistently been found that the education of a nonresidential father is associated with higher levels of involvement with his children (Furstenberg et al., 1983; Seltzer, 1991). Seltzer and Bianchi (1998) found that nonresidential fathers who were well-educated were more likely to “conform to the dominant social expectations” (p. 665) of close ties between parents and children despite separation.

Prior Attachment with Children

There has been some research conducted that illustrates how the quality of a nonresidential father's relationship with his children prior to divorce affects or is a factor in the quality of their relationship after divorce. In 1976, Hetherington, et al. studied a small group of highly involved and attached fathers who chose to stop seeing their children because seeing them irregularly was too painful. In that study, it was found that fathers who described themselves as highly involved and reported that they used to take part in household chores during their marriages were more likely to lose contact with their children. Inversely, those who reported to have been on the fringe of their children's lives were more likely to remain in contact with their children. Kruk (1994) found that disengaged fathers were consistently scoring higher on measures of predivorce involvement, attachment, and influence. Some rationale for this phenomenon are included in the "failure to mourn" section of this chapter. Additionally, Dudley (1991) found that amount of contact between a nonresidential father and his children was not primarily decided based on the type of prior relationship he had with his children, but rather the age of the children. He found the older the children became, and the more their needs changed, and the less amount of contact nonresidential fathers would have with their children.

Absence

As previously described, research has shown that the amount of contact between nonresidential fathers and their children varies. There are some fathers who become absent in their children's lives after divorce. Arendell (1995) found that absence is more than just an action taken by nonresidential fathers, but it is a perceived option. Fathers

who have contact with their children “perceived absence to be a viable option not only for other men but also for themselves under certain, conceivable circumstances” (Arendell, 1992, p.565). These results were also found in Arendell’s 1995 study.

Nonresidential fathers report in Arendell’s 1992 study that there were various reasons why absence takes place. Some reported that it is not an actual decision but rather something that becomes a condition over time after missed visits with children. Other fathers viewed their relationships as being “tenuous,” which made them feel as if being a fully absent parent was a realistic decision. More specifically, some nonresidential fathers felt that they were more like visitors to their children than fathers, which made them feel that being an absent father would not be that different from their present state. Some other fathers discussed that fathers becoming absence in their children’s lives was generally a “direct consequence” of their experiences, such as constant fighting with their ex-partners during divorce (Arendell, 1992). One participant commented that “seeing his children (was) not worth the hassle” (Arendell, 1995, p. 146). More explanation as to what those hassles may be will be explained in the “factors preventing contact” section of this chapter.

Factors Preventing Contact

Conflictual Relationship with Ex-partner

After divorce, some ex-partners remain in a conflictual relationship. This may affect a nonresidential father’s relationship with his children. Arendell (1995) concluded that interpersonal struggles were inevitable because a relationship based on shared feelings and hopes ended and left the couple with negative feelings, such as disappointment and bitterness. Hetherington, Cox, & Cox (1978) interviewed 96 families

directly after divorce, then again after two months, again after one year, and again after two years. They found that after two months, 66% of the exchanges between the divorced couples involved conflict. These couples reported that the most common areas of conflict were finances, support, visitation, childrearing, and intimate relations with others. This study also found all of the divorced couples, with the exception of four, had relationships with their ex partners that were characterized by acrimony, anger, resentment, feelings of desertion, and memories of painful conflicts. Continued conflict among divorced couples is not unusual. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) found when interviewing 116 children ten years after their original study, that half of the divorced couples they studied were still angry with their ex-partners.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that intense conflict between the ex partners interfered with on-going parent-child relationships: “The children’s acute responses to this stress (of the divorce) were magnified by the parents’ diminished capacity to parent at this time of crisis in their own lives” (p. 304). While Dudley (1991) found that none of the nonresidential fathers stated that their relationships with their ex-partners were obstacles in their relationships with their children. Some researchers reported that conflict was often associated with nonresidential fathers decreasing their contact with their children (Dudley; Fox, 1985; Kruk, 1991), or for disengagement (Arendell, 1995). Greif (1995) found in a qualitative study on 14 fathers who chose not to visit their children, that 64% blamed their ex-partners as their reason for not visiting their children.

Conflict in regards to children

Children were a common source of contention for many divorced couples. Several studies have shown that antagonistic encounters with ex-partners and little

discussion regarding their children, such as their well-being and schooling, are negatively associated with father involvement and contact with their children (Lund, 1987).

Arendell (1995) found that several men withdrew from their children after several months, due to “unsuccessfully embroiled in dissension with former spouse over arrangements (visitation) for the children” (p. 146). Arendell (1992) found that most conflicts between divorced partners were centered on issues regarding their children. “Quarrels over children’s educational experiences and moral religious guidance were common” (p. 568).

One specific area of conflict was residential mothers and nonresidential fathers accusing one another of abuse and/or neglect of their children. Ten of the 75 nonresidential fathers in Arendell’s (1992) qualitative study were investigated for abuse and neglect. Those fathers also reported that they were “disproportionally” accused of abuse over their partners. Paradise, Rostain, and Nathanson (1988) looked at 25 cases of sexual abuse allegations of children between the ages of four and 12 made in medical settings between 1985 and 1986. They compared cases that involved custody or visitation disputes and those which did not. Out of 25 cases looked at, 28% of the cases involved custody or visitation disputes. Paradise looked at six separate cases from her private practice and found that five of the six cases also involved custody or visitation disputes. They found that out of the 31 total cases, only 73% of the cases involving visitation and custody disputes were substantiated while those cases without disputes were substantiated 95% of the time. Nonresidential fathers sometimes felt that trust between the partners seemed impossible due to constant conflict (Arendell, 1995).

Conflicts as extensions of marriage

Bader and Pearson (1998) posited that ex-partners remained in conflictual relationships due to conflict in their marriage and divorce as an expression of emotional dependency. Conflicts can be seen as a “continuation of character” of the ex-partners marital relationship (Arendell, 1992). Continuing conversations and actions such as legal proceedings caused conflict which was a way of continuing a quasi-spousal connection. Some research showed that men remained connected with their children and continued their role as fathers as long as they were in a conflictual relationship with their ex-partners. Baum (2006) stated that disengagement took place with men who could not be fathers unless they could also be husbands.

Mother's “Gate-keeping”

Gate-keeping refers to the idea that one parent can influence a child's view of their other parent. Hobbs (2002) described this as a systematic belittling and undermining of the nonresidential parent which ensured that contact would most likely not be made. In general, the residential mothers' role is significant in determining the level of involvement and contact between children and their fathers (Arditti, 1995). Dunn (2004) reported that researchers found it difficult to establish the exact impact of gate keeping on children and their nonresidential fathers.

Preventing or limiting contact between a nonresidential father and his children was one form of gate keeping. (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Seltzer and Brandreth (1994) found that women carried greater control over their children when there was no father around. Mothers sometimes did this by controlling their younger children's schedules. Residential mothers created specific guidelines as to the time frames fathers

could visit their children. Evidence showed that children tended to align with the alienating parent (Hobbs, 2002). Arendell (1995) found that older children tended to be loyal to their mothers. Again, fathers argued that this was the result of “brainwashing.”

Failure to Mourn

Kruk (1994) reported that the majority of nonresidential fathers whom he studied seemed to be going through a grieving process while they were divorcing their partners. Jacobs (1983) found that divorced men tended to mourn the loss of their ex-partners a lot less than they mourned the loss of their children. He also found that parents who did not mourn their losses would remain absorbed in their grief and anger. This sometimes got in the way of their feelings towards their children. This was one major factor noted by nonresidential fathers for their disengagement (Kruk, 1992). Arendell (1995) found that some fathers felt they had to end contact with their children due to unresolved feelings regarding the loss of their marriage and children (1995). One of his participants reported, “Seeing my children simply reopens old wounds. It’s better to avoid reminders of the past” (Arendell, p.153). Another participant responded, in regards to needing to disengage from his children due to pain, “I do what has to be done to survive.” (Arendell, 1995, p.157).

Kruk (1992) also researched the issue of mourning. He found that some nonresidential fathers continued to mourn, while others got stuck on a “continuum.” Some fathers were able to work through their grief, and reported positive outcomes for their relationships with their children. Additionally, highly attached fathers had a more difficult task of grieving. Hetherington, et al. (1978) found similar results as Kruk with

eight of the participants. After two years the highly attached nonresidential fathers saw their children infrequently. They reported that they still felt depressed.

Internal Conflict

Many nonresidential fathers dealt with their own personal conflict in addition to their conflict with others. Arendell (1995) reported that it was best that some nonresidential fathers avoid conflict with others because with some “anger is so deep and exchanges between them so volatile that the risk of inflicting serious bodily harm on (their) former wife was increasingly great” (p. 145). Arendell also found that constant thoughts of sorrow and anger threatened some fathers’ sense of competency.

Thinking of Ex-partner as One

The mourning process is important so that a father can redefine himself, which is discussed in the “role identity” section, as a nonresidential, single father. A father needed to mourn his marital roles and his previous identity (Baum, 2006). Without self-definition and mourning, some nonresidential fathers perceived their ex-partners and their children as a single entity. One nonresidential father reported, “Every time I see those children, I am overwhelmed by memories. They are a living reminder of *my* marriage, *my* wife, and the years of pointless effort. Being a father is all tied up with being a husband” (Arendell, 1992, p. 571).

This process of viewing the ex-partner and child as a single entity has also been noted to affect a father’s motivation for paying child support. Some nonresidential fathers viewed giving child support as a form of paying the mother, instead of support for the child (Baum, 2006). Some fathers refused to pay child support thinking that by not doing so they were punishing their ex-partners rather than their children (Arendell, 1992).

One father stated, “Why should I have to pay for children whom I do not live with and whom I do not have a part in raising? By paying child support, I simply reinforce my ex for having left the marriage and denied me my children” (p. 573).

Second marriage

There is not a lot known about how second partners affect nonresidential fathers’ attitudes towards caring for their children (Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994). Some scholars posit (Furstenberg, et al., 1983, Seltzer, 1991) that one reason nonresidential fathers discontinued relationships with their children after they remarried was because their previous life competed with their new life. In essence, the father chose to focus on his new life with his new partner, rather than his old life with his children from a previous marriage. Seltzer and Brandreth (1994) found some fathers remarried due to their strong feelings about family. If their new partners felt the same way that they did, then those new partners encouraged a high level of involvement between the nonresidential fathers and their children. Conversely, when a residential mother remarried, it complicated the nonresidential father’s relationship with his children because the nonresidential father sometimes felt that the child had a new father (Furstenberg, et al., 1983).

Economics

One area of research is the affects of a nonresidential father’s economic situation on his relationship with his children. Seltzer (1991) found that child support often declined after the first two years of divorce. She posited that one reason for this was because there are many fathers who can barely support one household so it is difficult for them to attempt to support two of them. Seltzer (1991) also found that as economic support decreased, contact decreased, and the influence the nonresidential father had over

his children's lives also decreased. She believed that the economic contributions affected the contact because "residential mothers maybe less willing to allow fathers to participate in childrearing decisions if the fathers do not also fulfill the economic responsibilities of childrearing by paying child support" (p. 82).

Arendell's (1995) study found that nonresidential fathers described taking care of their children as cumbersome. One participant explained that visits with his children cost more than his child support. Another participant explained that if the nonresidential father moves away, then the airfare to see the children can be very expensive. A third participant stated that his kids saw visiting him like going to a party, in that they wanted to go out to eat and go to the movies. He explained that it gets very expensive. Although this expense may affect the nonresidential father, Arendell (1995) found that financial issues did not explain father disengagement.

Role Identity

Ahrons (1981) posited that parents must create and implement new rules for parenting together in their new family structure while at the same time giving up their roles as marital partners. Later, Dudley (1996) stated that fathers must adjust to no longer being in a shared residence with their children. Many men said that this was their most significant loss. The reality was that most men did not anticipate living separately from their families (Lund, 1987), and because of this, men seemed unsure about their roles as fathers, and as a men after divorce. A reason for this was that society gave few normative guidelines as to how to be a nonresidential father, which resulted in a lack of clarity. Additionally, fathers faced with poorly defined roles were coupled with physical separation from their children. According to Arditti (1995), nonresidential fathers found

themselves unprepared to deal with the realities of renegotiating their relationships with their children after their divorce. This increase of stress over role identity increased their withdrawal from parenting. Hetherington (1993) posited another reason for stress regarding role identity in that divorce is a process that involves series of transitions over a large period of time. Demo & Ganong (1994) reported that the first one or two years post-divorce were characterized by the restructuring of parental and spousal roles. This was also a time in which there was an increase in conflict and legal battles.

Ambiguity of Fatherhood

One reality of divorce was that children living in a single-parent home were most likely living with their mothers (Marsiglio, 1992; Seltzer, 1991). Thus the role of the mother remained fairly consistent (Arendell, 1995), while it was the father's role, the man leaving the household, which was in "flux" (Marsiglio, 1992; Seltzer, 1991). A father must learn to deal with setting up visitations, creating part-time relationships with his children, and relationship from a distance (Arendell, 1995). In general, post-divorce roles and relationships, according to Seltzer (1991), were not well established, thus their roles as nonresidential fathers were ambiguous. Fathers, even after they had established their visitation schedules, and attempted their new parenting techniques, still needed to wait for the responses from their children and ex-partners (Lund, 1987). This process was one that was anxiety provoking.

Fathers reported receiving "ambiguous" messages from their families (Seltzer, 1991), and from the media as to what it meant to take care of children whom they did not live with. Seltzer (1991) writes "I propose that separated parents do not know what fathers' roles ought to be and the ambiguity in expectations about fathers' responsibilities

may account for sporadic and diverse patterns of paternal involvement” (p. 80). Scholars suggested that nonresidential fathers’ stress of the ambiguity increased the likelihood that they withdraw from their relationships with their children (Seltzer, 1991).

Identity

For some fathers, their self-esteem was negatively affected by a divorce. Some described it as a difficult task to demonstrate competency and resiliency when they felt less than that (Arendell, 1995). Part of the reason that this took place was because of all the changes a nonresidential father went through when taking on that status. The previous identity of a father was “negotiated” within his relationship with his wife and their marriage. Not only did the fathers need to rework their identities, but they needed to find a way to have a new type of authority over their children after they moved outside of the home (Arendell, 1995). In Arendell’s (1995) study, one participant reported that with all the “divorce injustices,” it was sometimes important for fathers to focus on just being a man. The participant said, “First things first, being a father requires being a man” (p. 145)

Father’s Rights

Not only did the roles of a nonresidential father change, but so did their rights. Some fathers in Leite and McKenry’s (2002) study reported that they felt many of their ex-partners actions were intended to deny them some of their rights as fathers. Other men in the study felt that it was the legal system who “emasculated” them. The court system did so by controlling their money and how much of it was to go to child support. Arendell (1995) also found the theme of men feeling “emasculated.” These men reported

that on top of having to leave their families, they were then “disregarded” as a father and made into being just an “income earner.”

Disneyland Dad

Due to the ambiguity of a nonresidential parent’s role as a father, some fathers were unsure about how to act around their children. There was a stereotype that the parent who was nonresidential was considered the fun parent (Arditti, 1995). Furstenberg and Nord (1985) found in their qualitative study that nonresidential fathers felt that their interactions with their children were more social and recreational than reported by residential fathers and mothers. These nonresidential fathers also reported they did not do a lot of disciplining.

Role of visitor

“I will not be a visiting uncle. I refuse to let some woman, judge, attorney, or social worker reduce me to that status. I am a parent and parents do not visit their children” (Arendell, 1995, p. 147). Some nonresidential fathers felt uncomfortable in their new role that they did not understand who they had been reduced to in the eyes of their children. Other fathers in Arendell’s (1995) study felt that visitation with their children made them their babysitters rather than their father. There were many fathers who explained that “fathers are pushed out of their children’s lives by a conspiracy between an unjust judicial system and their former wives, which makes conflict inevitable” (p. 148).

Conclusion

Divorce is a topic that has been studied extensively, but the majority of the research has been conducted from women’s, especially mothers’ points of view (Kruk,

1994; Arditti, 1995). The purpose of this chapter was to explore a selection of literature on nonresidential fathers, as well as demonstrate the importance of understanding the experiences of a nonresidential father. The understanding of issues relating to contact between nonresidential fathers and his children, factors which may prevent contact, and role identity issues of a nonresidential father, will hopefully help clinicians form a clearer understanding of working with divorced families. This review did not exhaust all literature on divorce or on nonresidential fathers. It merely is a look at specific areas of research within this subject.

The researcher found some limitations in her exploration of the literature. There was not much research on minority nonresidential fathers. The research on minority nonresidential fathers was generally specific to African American nonresidential fathers. This is a significant weakness in the literature considering that divorce is a phenomenon affecting all races.

Much more research needs to be done in this arena, however, in order to better understand the experience of fathers in relationship to divorce. This study seeks to address another gap in the research. This gap is looking at the nonresidential fathers' perceptions of the influence of divorce, which the father considers to have been acrimonious, on his relationship with his children. Looking at it through the perception of a nonresidential father adds to the limited divorce literature from that perspective.

Added research in this area will also benefit the field of Social Work. Clinicians frequently work with divorced families and knowing more about the thoughts and feelings of a nonresidential father and his experiences should help better guide treatment.

Looking at this information through the lens of family systems theory will hopefully be a tool for family therapists.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study examined nonresidential fathers' perceptions of the influence of divorce, which the father considers to have been acrimonious, on his relationship with his children. The purpose of this study was to develop a greater understanding of how nonresidential fathers perceive their relationship with their children after a divorce. A qualitative study design was used to capture the perceptions and experiences of the nonresidential fathers.

The method that was used for this design was a face-to-face semi-structured interviews which lasted approximately one and a half hours. There were a set of 11 guiding questions.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of divorced men who were currently living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, or Buck's County, Pennsylvania. The researcher worked with an organization, Fathers' & Children's Equality, Inc., to generate a sample. This was an organization whose purpose is to advocate for both parents to have full access to their children. The researcher provided the organization a copy of her recruitment letter (see Appendix A) to send out on their listserv to its Pennsylvania chapter.

Potential participants were prescreened to verify their eligibility in the study. The inclusion criteria stated that the participant perceived his divorce to have been

acrimonious, he was divorced between 2000 and 2005, and he has at least one child, biological or adopted, between the ages of six and 12.

Overall the researcher was contacted by 22 nonresidential fathers. Three of those men never confirmed an interview date, and one father declined to participate. Five men did not meet the inclusion criteria, and one father missed two of his scheduled interviews and was informed that the study was completed. Unfortunately, the diversity of the participant pool was contingent on the men who responded to the recruitment letter as well as men who fit the inclusion criteria. No participant was excluded on the basis of his religion, race, or ethnicity. In total, 12 nonresidential fathers were interviewed.

The interviews were held at two locations. If the participant was able to meet during the week, then the interview was done at the researcher's agency in her office. If the interview was conducted during the weekend, the researcher met the participant in a private room of a public library. The interviews lasted for approximately one and a half hours.

Participants

All 12 men interviewed were nonresidential fathers. The participants varied in socioeconomic status (SES). One participant's annual income fell in the range of 0-\$24,999, three participants reported their income as \$25,000-\$49,999, and three reported being in the \$50,000-\$74,999 range. Then two participants reported an income of \$75,000-\$100,000, while three participants reported to have over \$100,000. The educational background of the participants varied. Five participants reported having some college experience or having completed high school. The other eight either completed college or had post-baccalaureate education.

The ages of the participants ranged in age from 35 to 52 with a mean of 42.5 years old. Ten participants identified their race as Caucasian and two identified as being Asian. Three participants identified their ethnicity as Indian, two as Jewish, two as Irish/German, and one as Irish/German/Italian. One participant identified himself as Italian, one participant identified himself as being Polish, and one participant identified himself as being Italian/Polish. Additionally one participant identified himself as being Irish/Albanian.

All participants were married and are currently divorced. They were married for an average of 7.7 years, with a low of six months, and a high of thirteen years. Nine of the participants reported that their ex-wives initiated their divorce. The average years these men were married was 7.94. Two participants reported that they initiated divorce, and these men were married an average of 1.75 years. One participant, who was married 11 years, reported that his divorce was a mutual decision.

Five participants have one child and seven had two children. All of the participants' children were biological with the exception of one participant who had two adopted children. The average age of the children was 9.6. The youngest child was three and the oldest was fifteen. Those participants with children outside of the inclusion criteria had a second child who fit the criteria.

Ethics and Safeguards

All participants were informed of the safeguards taken in the research design. All notes, transcripts, and the digital recorder are kept in a locked box in the researcher's desk at home and will remain there for three years, as per federal regulations. The participants were informed that their identities were disguised in the final write up.

Each participant was informed of the risks and benefits of participating in the study. The benefits of participating were speaking up for divorced fathers and stating their case concerning the importance of being a part of their children's lives. A risk was discussing painful and emotional material. Names of divorce support groups and psychotherapists in Philadelphia were provided to participants in case of need (see Appendix E). Based on federal regulations, this study was safe due to the nature of the benefits outweighing the risks.

Data Collection

The Human Subjects Review Board of Smith College School for Social work approved this thesis study (see Appendix F). The design process began with recruitment letters, which laid out the purpose of the study as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The participants were then sent informed consents (see Appendix B). Once the participants agreed to participate, the data was then collected by using a face-to-face semi-structured interview technique.

Participants were first asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire, which included questions on how long they had been divorced, household income prior to divorce, their race, religion, and age (see Appendix C). The participants were asked questions regarding their perceptions on their relationships with their spouses prior to, during, and after their divorce. They were also asked questions regarding their current relationships with their children. At the end of the interview participants were asked to reflect on their divorce experience and if they could, what would they change and what do they think the outcome of the changes might be (see Appendix D).

The data was collected with a digital recorder, and some notes were written down during the course of the interview. The interviewee was informed ahead of time of this process and that the notes were used as personal notes, such as thoughts, connections, and nonverbal behavior on the part of the participant. The researcher transcribed the data herself and with a professional transcriber. The researcher inserted notes made during the session as well as inserting reactions and nonverbal responses that the researcher recalled from the interviews. These were necessary steps to allow for accuracy and interpretability (Anastas, 1999).

Data Analysis

The coding process began with an open-ended approach. This entailed going through each transcribed interview several times and noting in the margins themes, critiques, and important quotations that emerged from the data. These notes were then inserted into a spreadsheet designed to look for further relevant information. The spreadsheet also helped the researcher to analyze comparisons and similarities among the 12 interviews. The researcher then took a constant comparative approach to the coding. This was an inductive, deductive, and then again inductive process which helped to find all the relevant themes (Padgett, 1998). By taking this process the researcher was able to narrow down and focus on themes of similarities, differences, and relevant quotes, as well as outliers.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a greater understanding of how nonresidential fathers' perceived their relationships with their children after divorce. Divorce is a topic that has been studied extensively from the view of the wife and children but more research needed to be done in understanding fathers and their role during and after a divorce. This study looked at nonresidential fathers' perceptions of the influence of divorce, which the fathers considered to have been acrimonious, on their relationships with their children.

All 12 participants had two distinct similarities: all reported having a good quality relationship with their children prior to divorce and all participants reported that they were greatly affected, in one way or another, by their divorce processes. Two dominant themes emerged in the interviews: the beliefs that the acrimonious actions taken by their ex wives throughout the divorce process harmed their ability to be fathers, and their beliefs that their overall experiences with the judicial system throughout the divorce and child custody processes harmed their ability to be fathers. These two overall themes are interconnected with the various analyses that emerged from the study.

Ex Wife

The following section displays the participants' perceptions of the impact their ex wives' actions had on their lives and their relationships with their children. The following sub-sections of this chapter include sections on restraining orders, the

participants' experiences in prison due to the restraining orders, enduring child abuse accusations and being forced to see their children under supervision. These sections are intertwined with the theme of the inequalities of the judicial system. Other sub-sections include the interference of the ex wives on scheduled visits, the "brainwashing" of children against one parent, and the men's perceived effects of their wives' mental illnesses.

Protection from Abuse

Six fathers interviewed had received protections from abuse (PFA), a type of restraining order, from their ex wives. All of these restraining orders took place prior to the divorce process, and for most of the participants the PFA signified the start of the process. Some of these fathers reported not being aware there was an abuse order against them until they entered their home and were arrested a few minutes later. Other fathers were arrested multiple times, first for the initial PFA, and later for breaking it.

These six participants reported being "surprise" when they realized a PFA was filed against them. One participant reported, "She got up in the morning with me, and then in the evening she does not come back, and uh she had put an abuse case on me." Another participant reported, "I talked to the attorney for like an hour about it and I'm not abusive, I don't hit her and I've never done anything that she is claiming I did. I yell and scream and have called her a couple of names but that is it." And then a few weeks later he was arrested after unknowingly violating his PFA order.

For the most part, these fathers reported that they never abused their ex wives. One father admitted to raising his fists to his wife, but not actually hitting her. He made

it clear that he realized it was wrong for him to threaten her but insisted that did not touch her.

All six of these participants reported that they were informed that the PFA prevented them from returning to their homes without a police escort. Additionally, until an arrangement was worked out, they were not allowed to see their children. One participant explained, “All my connections were cut off from my daughter for almost two weeks, and then we had to go to court.” Another participant reported, “I had been seeing (my kids) everyday for a long long time, since they were babies.” That participant reported that he could not get a court date for four months so he went four months without seeing his children. A third participant reported that he did not get to see his children for a month due to a protection from abuse order (PFA), and when he went to see his daughter she backed away from him. He reported that it was “hurtful.”

Prison as Result of PFA

Four participants reported that they were arrested for either violating PFA orders or for domestic violence charges which then turned into PFA orders. Two of the three men were arrested in the middle of the night. All three men reported they were unclear at the time of the arrest what they were being charged with.

For a week I didn't know what I did. Until the day before court I saw the PFA and then I saw what she (ex wife) wrote and then I told my attorney, my public defender, and I told her I'm innocent and I'm pleading innocent and she said NO. She said you have to plead guilty, and I'm like for what.

These participants were informed by their attorneys that if they did not plead guilty they would have to remain in jail.

One participant explained the charges in more detail. “Uh there what I saw was that they had two charges against me, not one. Probably you may know that but it looks like that is a very common tactic. They give you two charges against you and then give you a deal.” The participant reported that the two charges were for domestic violence and harassment. They were informed that if they plead guilty to domestic violence then the harassment charge would be dropped.

So in pleading guilty to domestic violence the deal was keeping the restraining order permanent. I didn't know what the meaning of these terms were. Then the judge says you are not allowed to go to the home, you are not allowed to meet the children, and you are not allowed to go to the school.

All of these men, after being issued a PFA, and after time in jail were then informed that by no means were they to go home, and more specifically they were not allowed to have any contact with their children. All men expressed their surprise regarding how the PFA prevented them from being with their children.

These men also expressed resentment towards their ex wives for filing PFAs against them, and having them thrown in jail, especially because these men continued to deny abusing their ex wives. These participants experienced more than just being told that it was time for a separation, but that their marriages were over and, for a period of time, so was their time with their children. These men appeared to believe that their ex wives, because they were women, held all the power. This was because the women were able to report that they were being abused, and the men reported that they felt if they were to report that their ex wives were abusive the results would have been very different.

Child Abuse Allegations

Five participants reported that during their divorce processes their ex wives not only reported that they were abused but also made child abuse allegations towards the participants or someone close to the participants. One participant reported that his ex wife accused his current wife, a school teacher, of exposing herself to his son. The participant explained, “But when you say enough things about something, even if they are true or not...when you keep saying it I look like an asshole.”

Two of the five participants reported that they were formally investigated by Children and Youth Services for child abuse. One participant explained that while he was still living in his house with his family, during separation, his son was acting out. The participant reported that he put his son in a time-out and his son slipped which resulted in a rug burn. The participant’s ex wife had taken photographs and filed a child abuse claim against him. This participant reported that he had to move out of the house during the investigation, and that his son was questioned in school. The claim was unfounded.

The second participant was also investigated by Children and Youth Services for physically abusing his son, but this investigation took place later in the participant’s divorce process.

I have a stack of children and youth (papers) because they can investigate you every year and I got investigated every year since the divorce and recently she (ex wife) dragged my fiancé into (it) saying that her son was doing stuff to my son...

This participant also reported that Children and Youth Services investigated his mother, who worked with children for 17 years, and his brother. He reported that all cases were unfounded.

Supervised Visitation

Two participants reported that they were ordered to have supervised visitation with their children during the beginning of their divorce processes. These fathers were ordered to have supervised visitation because of the PFAs initially filed against them.

One father recounted that his supervised visitation was a humiliating experience.

Umm (it was) in some public place for two hours. It was such derogation for the situation for me. Here I was coming home everyday at four o'clock (prior to the divorce) taking the kids to the part or Chuck E Cheese, having fun with them. Now two hours under some guy supervising in the mall, a crowded mall, ugh. She would come and laugh loud.

The other participant was ordered to have supervised visits because he tested positive for "pot" from a judicially-ordered hair follicle test. He was allowed to see his children one evening a week, supervised. He also had to undergo drug testing. He then reported that at one point his children asked to stop the visits because they did not like to be supervised. A few months later the participant went back to court. He reported that the judge told him

There has to be a reintroduction of the children into my life, even though the biggest part of my case was how I was always part of their lives...so he (judge) says we need to reintroduce you to the kids, so two months I had to go back to supervised visits.

These fathers both reported that there was no reason for their wives to put them in a position of being supervised with their children. They reported that if their ex wives had not filed the PFAs against them there would have been no reason for the judges to order

supervised visitation. Both of these fathers reported that it was a negative situation to be in with their children.

“Visiting Games”

Five participants reported having to deal with their ex wives’ “games” when they attempted to spend their court ordered time with their children. One participant reported that his ex wife refused to drop his son off in certain locations or with certain family members. A different participant reported that at one point after the divorce, his ex wife moved with her daughter and that since then, he had no knowledge of where they were living or how to contact them. This same participant reported that on days he was ordered to pick his daughter up from school, his ex wife would pick her up early. This prevented his visits from taking place. This participant also reported that on a separate occasion while he was in his house with his daughter his ex wife, her sister and her brother broke in and grabbed his daughter and ran out of the house.

One participant reported that there were many times he would go to pick up his son and his ex wife would lock the door or she was not home.

I would show up and I’d (be) waiting and they would call and say we are running late and then they wouldn’t show up. Or I’d pick him up and I’d be early to pick him up and they would wait until the last minute to bring him out or they wouldn’t bring him out at all. I would knock on their (his ex wife and her parents) door, the car door, they are in the car, and they were right there and they would ignore me, and they would drive off and they would say I never showed up.

He reported that the judge never changed anything. This participant also reported difficulties when he would pick up his son when his son was sick. He reported that his ex wife refused to give him the medication his son needed during stays with him. He reported that he would then have to spend the visit taking his son to the doctor for his

own set of medication. “I brought it up in court...she denied it (pause) so nothing was ever done about it.” This participant reported that his ex wife also prevented him from taking his son on a family trip to Disneyland even though it was his scheduled vacation. He reported that his ex wife called him a few days later saying he could take his son, but at that point this participant was already in Florida.

There were two participants who filed emergency petitions to their judges because of their ex wives’ “games.” In both cases the fathers reported that they were scheduled to have supervised visits with their children and their ex wives were not showing up. Both participants reported that they were told by their judges that not seeing their children was not an emergency. One father filed the emergency petition in June and the court did not hear his case until December. He reported that for those six months his wife was preventing him from seeing his children.

The participants reported that the “visiting games” initiated by their ex wives impacted them in two ways. It prevented them from seeing their children, which was what all these fathers were fighting to do, and it spurred further resentment towards their ex wives. Each game that was played created more of a rift between the participants and their ex wives, with less of a chance for repair. These participants appeared to believe that their ex wives were deliberately exploiting the control they had, as the parent with the most custody, and intentionally preventing them from spending time with their children.

“Parent Alienation”

Four fathers raised their concern that their relationships with their children were affected by “parent alienation.” Parent alienation is when one parent says negative things

to turn the child against the other parent. Two of the men reported that their wives attempted to convince their children that time with their mothers was better than with their fathers:

She (ex wife) would go with him (my son) to the bathroom and she would say don't forget what mommy told you, mommy misses you very much and when you come home we will have all kinds of fun stuff to do. She would ruin his weekend by telling him all the fun stuff she will do at home instead of telling him to go have a good time with them.

These participants reported that this was significant because their ex wives were sabotaging their time with their children from the start of their scheduled visit.

Additionally, two of these fathers reported that their ex wives had a tendency to alienate one child more than the other against them. The child who was most alienated was the child who most resembled the personality and temperament of the ex wife. These fathers reported that the alienation was so strong that it was difficult to have a relationship with the alienated child, and that there was not a lot of hope for a future relationship.

Ex Wives with Mental Illness

Three participants reported that their ex wives were "bipolar" and one participant reported that his wife had a "personality disorder." Two of these participants reported that court evaluators had diagnosed their ex wives, although off the record. One of these men was told by his court evaluator that his ex wife may be bipolar and have borderline personality disorder. This participant reported how difficult it was to live with her. Another participant, who felt that his wife was bipolar, reported that when she was triggered she would have episodes of physical abuse towards him. He reported that she

would do this in front of his son. “If you ever want to hear the most blood curdling sound in your life it is to hear your child scream, don’t hit my daddy!”

All of the actions of the participants’ ex wives, which were reported in this section, impacted the amount of time these fathers had with their children, as well as the quality of their relationships with their children during and after their divorces. The fathers with ex wives with mental illness reported many difficult experiences with their ex wives even prior to divorce, but other fathers reported that they never expected their relationships with their ex wives could turn out the way they did. All these fathers appeared to hold a lot of anger and resentment towards their ex wives due to the wives reported interference with the nonresidential fathers’ relationships with their children.

The Divorce Process

Not only did these 12 participants report feeling as though they were always fighting a losing battle with their ex wives, they also reported feeling as though they were fighting losing battles with their judicial system. In general the participants reported feeling that the system was out dated and flawed. The following sub-sections capture the specific battles and failures reported by the participants. Many participants reported feeling dismissed by judges and their preconceived notion of a “deadbeat” father. They also reported feeling as though they were given unfair custody time with their children, even after fighting for full custody. These fathers felt that they not only had to impress their judges, but also court evaluators, who also were perceived to favor their ex wives. Lastly, fathers reported being required to pay most of their salaries to their ex wives in child support, a fact which spurred further resentment towards their ex wives and created personal hardships.

Court System

Ten out of the 12 participants reported feeling that the judicial system was “flawed.” One father described the system as “promoting fathers to run.” Another reported that the “domestic laws have not kept up with today’s society.” One father reported that “lives were being destroyed” while another father reported that the family court “caters” to mothers and treats fathers poorly. “The court system doesn’t work and it is horrible to dads like they are the worst person. I am not a bad person. All I wanted was my rights...” Another father explained, “We are not in the fifties anymore. It isn’t mom takes the kids and dad goes to work.”

Judge

Three participants experienced judges whom they considered to be more favorable to women than men. One participant reported that one of the reasons he initially did not want a divorce was because he had heard from other men that his family court judge favored women. He reported that this judge told his lawyer that “by no means” would she ever grant him joint custody. Another participant reported that both his lawyer and a cop in his town told him to be careful because his judge was a “man hater.” A third participant reported that when he took his case to a superior court he was surprised by what two of the female judges had to say to him.

Women won’t have equal rights until men do their share. I said your honor I more than did my share. I took care of the kids while she was at work. The kids know me as their father, as a parental figure, the guy who cut their sandwiches in triangles or squares, whatever they wanted. My daughter knows me. One of the (other) judges, I’m not going to say her name, said you’re gonna be sitting in a bar, you’re gonna be fine. You are just like all the other fathers. You’ll be fine. You’ll be in the bar drinkin’ your beer with your kid someday.

These men reported that from the start they did not have a chance of presenting their case in a fair, non biased environment.

Full Custody Attempt

Six participants reported that they filed for sole custody of their children. One father reported that he initially filed for joint custody but his lawyer told him he needed to file for sole custody to demonstrate to the judge how serious he was. One father attempted full custody twice and reported that the only outcome was two extra weeks during the summer to be with his children. Another father explained what his court experience was like.

I felt, well I hate to say it, and I do believe that both parents should work together to raise a child, but again if I'm forced to live under the current domestic laws unfortunately I am forced to go and prove that I am a better parent. That to me is an error in our laws today. The laws should be changed to support cooperative parenting, but we are not at that point.

None of these participants were granted full custody, and many reported that they believed that this was mainly due to their "man hating" judges, and their flawed judicial system.

Amount of Custody Awarded

Despite not being granted full custody, these fathers reported being granted some amount of time with their children. Four fathers reported that they were granted what they referred to as the "vanilla stamp," which was one night a week (for dinner) and seeing their children every other weekend. This was the expected arrangement judges granted to the nonresidential fathers. Another father reported that this "vanilla stamp" arrangement meant that a father had 43% of custody.

I couldn't figure out why the judge would do it that way except then I found out that in the event that we had 50/50 (custody) then child support would more than likely be waived and that the federal government funds the counties 25 cents on every dollar for every dollar that is collected.

Two fathers reported that they were granted weekend visitation. A third father saw his son every weekend but reported only being granted every other weekend. One father with this arrangement fought hard for it. He reported that he initially was only allowed to visit his son twice a week for one hour at his daycare. Then he was granted two, three hour evening visits but the participant lived 40 minutes away from his son. He reported that he would bathe and feed him, and then drive him home. After a few more custody attempts, he was then granted an additional Sunday visit from three to eight in the evening. The judge explained to him that (his son) "was too young to stay overnight. He has a special bond with his mother that he couldn't be separated." He was then granted the weekends. Another father with this arrangement expressed his anger about it.

Unless one parent is obviously a threat to that child or is in whatever way, emotionally, psychologically unbalanced, is abusing physically, they should get equal time with their child. And that should be the law. It isn't in this state, in a lot of states it is. It starts that way. I'm going through a custody battle so that I can get, you know *almost* equal time of my daughter.

None of the fathers reported that the judges ever specifically stated that one reason for the type of custody issued was based on previous PFAs or jail time, with the exception of supervised visitation.

Some of these fathers went on to describe what it was like to be a nonresidential father with limited custody. "Being with the kids 24/7 when they were little, I am now reduced to the part time parent and I'm not a part time parent. It burns my butt." One father reported that he felt like seeing his children was like "visiting time rather than

parenting time” because he no longer was involved in the day-to-day activities. Another father expressed his anger over the idea of visitation because he reported, “We do not visit our children, we *parent* our children.” Unfortunately the amount of time these men were allotted to parent their children appeared limited.

Court Evaluations

Seven participants reported being court ordered to take part in a court evaluation from a psychologist to determine the mental stability of each parent as well as who was best fit to raise their children. These generally consisted of meeting with each spouse alone and then the children. One participant reported that “custody evaluations are court ordered usually, uh, um, and they’re usually very expensive and they’re of limited value and in the sense that they prolong the adversarial process of divorce. I wouldn’t recommend them.” The six other participants may agree with this statement. All men reported that the evaluations were expensive. One man reported he paid \$1700, and another participant paid \$6000. Some of these participants were ordered to have more than one evaluation, and in the majority of the cases the father reported that he had to pay for the evaluations.

One father explained that the evaluation reported that he had a closer relationship with his son than his daughter so he was granted one extra day with his son. This participant was unclear as to how the evaluator came up with this conclusion because the evaluator never interviewed the participant with his children. Another father reported that despite his evaluation stating that custody should be 50/50, the judge kept the original custody arrangement the way it was prior to the evaluation. While another participant was also given the report that he and his ex wife should have equal custody

and he reported that the judge granted him an overnight visit, which he previously did not have. Another participant reported that the evaluator refused to “touch” the custody arrangement because it would affect the child support.

A few participants believed that the reason court evaluators generally did not report in favor of the father is because it would affect the amount of money the state received through child custody and child support.

The title 4D program of the Social Security Administration under the target of needy families, but it applies to all families, is the Child Support Incentive Program...The state and local courts, or the child support enforcement agencies, which in PA are under the Department of Welfare but get funded through the court system, get federal incentive money to go out and collect child support. It is about eight cents to the dollar. The only way they can get the money is to first remove you (the father) from the child.

Some fathers reported that they believed that this process, if changed, affects how much money will eventually go towards the evaluators. The money then decreases if the father receives equal custody because he will not be required to pay child support.

Two participants expressed frustration over this process in regards to their ex wives’ mental illnesses. One father, who had been to three different evaluators, was finally told by the evaluator that his wife was bipolar but that she was not in a position to diagnose her. Another participant reported that the evaluation stated that his ex wife had personality issues, and that she tended to be spiteful. He reported that the judge did not make any changes after receiving that report.

A lot of these judges, they have a predetermined outcome. They believe that mothers can be better parents. Unless they are crack addicts, even then they go in, get themselves rehabbed and get their kids right back. It makes no sense.

These results indicated the experiences and hurdles these fathers had to go through with court procedures and court rulings, but inevitably their initial experiences which they perceived to be with biased judges seemed to dominate further experiences.

Child Support Modifications

All 12 participants expressed distress over the amount of support they were ordered to pay their ex wives. One participant reported that for five years his support was nearly half of his income. He reported that after five years it was knocked down \$500 from what he was originally ordered to pay. Another participant had to fight to have the amount reduced three times and was granted the reduction, while another reported that his was reduced twice because he was able to prove that his ex wife lied about her income. One participant explained his process.

For parents who cooperate if you look at the financial arrangements usually there is none to little. Each parent takes care of the child directly so why pay someone else...But no right now under the current system you are awarded for you know for trying to keep the other parent away. Back to my case again, the amount of money, even when she (ex wife) wasn't letting me see my son, was less than half than what the court awarded, yet I got to see my son more time. So I have got my son for more time, which I asked for, but now I have to pay her twice as much, which she says she needs, and it has gone up since then.

Two participants reported being jailed for not paying their child support. One of these men reported that he had been in jail a few times for a total of three months. The participant explained that he works at a commission only job. "And she knows I am on a commission only basis and child support is court ordered that is comes out of my pay so if she is not getting anything then I am not getting paid."

Another participant reported that he was at a good job and his ex wife kept calling his job and leaving harassing messages.

And they fired me! They laid me off which is the same thing. And I am out of work, and since I'm out of work I can't pay my child support, I'm not making that much when I'm laid off. So I got thrown in jail for being behind in child support, which is exactly what she (ex wife) wanted.

Other participants reported that they were afraid to leave their jobs and look for better in fear of their being a gap of time without a job and salary. Two fathers reported that because of the amount of support they pay they cannot afford to have more children with their current wives. These men reported that the amount of child support they needed to pay was unfair, because it was based on an unfair system from the court house that did not take into account their ex wives' earnings, and it was unfair of their wives to consistently ask for money that they did not need.

The participants were asked if they thought their child support went entirely towards their children's needs, and six participants smiled indicating what seemed to be their annoyance about the situation. Eight participants reported that there was "no way", while three never answered. One participant reported that "I think there are families in the city who live on less than what I pay her (in child support)."

Summary

This chapter exhibited the two dominant themes which emerged during the course of the interviews with the 12 nonresidential fathers in relation to their divorce and their children. All 12 of these fathers reported a desire to have a relationship with their children after divorce. Many of these fathers reported similar obstacles and experiences in trying to obtain those relationships, which were all impacted by their struggles with their ex wives and the judicial system. Due to the impact of the themes that surfaced in

this chapter, the majority of the fathers reported that they did not have the types of relationships they always hoped and imagined they would have with their children.

All of the nonresidential fathers reported good quality relationships with their children prior to their divorces. The majority of these men reported going from seeing their children everyday to infrequently. Similar to what is written in the literature, many fathers when seeing their children experienced parent alienation (Hobbs, 2002; Arendel, 1995). These 12 fathers have varying relationships with their children but all of the men reported working very hard in their attempts to continue in the role as a father to the best of their ability.

One area that appeared to impact the participants' relationships with their children were the actions of their ex wives. Similar to what is in the literature, many men had restraining orders and abuse allegations against them, and had to put up with their ex wives' "games" (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox (1978). The majority of the participants reported resentment and anger towards their wives because of their spiteful and damaging actions.

The other area that appeared to impact all of the participants was the judicial system which affected their divorce processes. From "man hating" judges to ideals that still believe the mother makes the best parent, men reported a lot of obstacles they were up against. Similar to what is in the literature, these men felt like they were being punished for the stereotype "deadbeat dad" when in fact these 12 men did not fit that stereotype (Arendell, 1995). All 12 men appeared to exhaust many resources to be in their children's lives as more than a visitor or a babysitter, but as a father.

Chapter V

Discussion

This qualitative study examined 12 nonresidential fathers' perceptions of the influence of their acrimonious divorces on their relationships with their children. Divorce is a topic that has been studied extensively from the perspectives of the wives and children, but more research is needed to understand fathers and their roles during and after divorce. Two dominant themes emerged from this study, regarding the influence of divorce on these fathers: the beliefs that the acrimonious actions taken by their ex wives throughout the divorce process harmed their ability to be fathers, and their beliefs that their overall experiences with the judicial system throughout the divorce and child custody processes harmed their ability to be fathers.

Major Findings

Nonresidential fathers spoke of several specific areas of conflict with their ex wives that impacted their relationships with their children. One area of contention, not found in prior studies, was the ex wives' use of the Protection from Abuse Order (PFA). It prevented fathers from seeing their children and spurred further resentment in the men towards their ex wives. Additionally in some cases it led to prison time and supervised visitation, which again led to further conflict. It was clear from participants, even years later, how much anger they continued to hold towards their ex wives for their accusations and actions. All of the participants reported that they never abused their ex wives and therefore should never have been issued a PFA.

Another area of conflict for the nonresidential fathers in this study and in the research was accusations of child abuse leveled against them by their ex wives. Paradise, Rostain, and Nathanson (1988) found that sexual abuse cases involving visitation or custody disputes were substantiated less frequently than those without disputes. None of the fathers or their family members who had child abuse cases filed against them by their ex wives were substantiated. One of the fathers was investigated every year since his divorce. Arendell (1995) found that fathers felt it was impossible to trust their ex partners due to this conflict, and the participants in this study would agree. The participants also seemed angered because while they were investigated they were not allowed to be in contact with their children. It was also hard for fathers to have relationships with their children when they were in constant fear of being accused of abusing them.

Specific acrimonious actions taken by ex wives, such as “gate-keeping” seemed to cause conflict and interfere with the relationships between nonresidential fathers and their children. Two areas of “gate-keeping” specifically addressed were “parent alienation” and “visiting games.” Hobbs (2002) described “parent alienation” as systematic belittling and undermining of the nonresidential parent which ensured that contact will most likely not be made. Some participants reported that this “brainwashing” caused the children to act differently towards them, and in some cases bad mouth them to court evaluators. Additionally in this study fathers felt that their ex wives seemed to alienate the child most like themselves more than the children who were more in line with the father, although no one hypothesized why this was.

In regards to “visiting games”, Seltzer and Brandreth (1994) found that mothers sometimes controlled their children by creating specific guidelines of when the father could meet with his children. Almost half of the participants reported being denied court ordered time with their children due to their ex wives creating their own schedules. There were even two fathers who filed emergency petitions because of this to see their children, and both were denied on the grounds of not being a true emergency. Fathers appeared most frustrated and hopeless when discussing these games. For the participants, the experience of the “visiting games” and “parent alienation” appeared to reiterate how little control they had over their relationships with their children.

These nonresidential fathers also noted losing battles with the judicial system which affected different areas of their relationships with their children. A specific issue, also found by Seltzer (1991) was that fathers received “ambiguous” messages from family, media, and in this study, judges, regarding the role of a nonresidential father. Many reported feeling as though they were being treated like deadbeat fathers with no rights. The participants also reported feeling as though the justice system promotes fathers to be uninvolved in their children’s lives. For some fathers this motivated them to fight harder to be the type of father they believed they could be, while for others it was discouraging. Many participants felt that the judges and society still do not understand that fathers have the ability and want to be just as active in their children’s lives as the mothers.

Another specific area participants expressed distress over was the amount of child support they were ordered to pay their ex wives. All of the fathers reported requesting less child support from the court system due to the difficulty of maintaining two

households. This was similar to Seltzer's (1991) findings although Seltzer also found that when support decreases so did contact, but that was not the case in this study. Some participants were jailed for not being able to pay their child support, which seemed to spur further anger and resentment towards the judicial system and their ex wives. Fathers also were not able to see their children, for the most part, when they were in prison.

There was one theme that emerged which differed from prior research, which was separate from the previously addressed dominant themes. Research showed that nonresidential fathers felt forced to live up to the stereotype of the nonresidential father as the fun parent who did not discipline his children (Arditti, 1995; Furstenberg & Nord, 1985). Although one parent reported feeling the pressure to be that type of father, the majority of the participants reported that they treated their children the same way they would if they were residential fathers. These fathers reported that they felt that regardless of their living arrangements, discipline and structure were still important aspects of their relationships with their children.

Limitations

The data retrieved from this qualitative study should be useful, although the validity of the interview is primarily based on the trustworthiness of the interviewees. There is a possibility of a bias that may arise during this study, such as a social desirability bias (Anastas, 1999). A father may have a tendency to view his position in his divorce and his role in his family in a better light than the reality. This may be due to wanting to make himself look good for his own sense of self or due to transference issues of being interviewed by a woman. These biases most likely were expressed within the interview process.

It is also important to note that all participants were from an organization, Fathers & Children's Equality, Inc. This was a voluntary organization which divorced men seeking equal access to their children joined. The researcher needed to take this into account: all participants were fighting for full custody of their children and few gave up. These men were part of a support group which also could account for the similar thoughts and feelings they expressed regarding the judicial system. Additionally these men came from similar geographical locations which also may account for similar experiences with judges.

Another limitation to the study was that the researcher was female. Although some men were very vocal about their anger towards women, some men may have held back their feelings so as to not insult her. Additionally a couple of participants addressed ambivalence about being interviewed by a researcher from Smith College, an all women's college. This may have inhibited other participants. There was also a possibility of researcher bias based on the researcher's gender. As a female she needed to attempt to be impartial.

Lastly, a limitation of the study was that all information found was only from the fathers' point of view. In order to have a complete study both the mothers and children would also have been interviewed.

Research Implications

The findings from this study revealed the perceived overwhelming injustices by the judicial system from the participants. Further research should focus on the impact the justice system had on nonresidential fathers. Many of the fathers in this study began their

divorce by fighting and some were forced to stop due to limited financial means and feelings of hopelessness in regards to fighting for fathers' rights in the court system.

Further research is also needed on the views of parental and gender roles, and the roles of fathers in general. Many participants felt that in the eyes of the judicial system and the media it is still assumed that the mother is the nurturer and the children should automatically be in the guardianship of the mother. This view that was strong in the 1950s may no longer be the case or the norm. Families, children, and nonresidential fathers may indeed be up against stereotypes that make it impossible to make their case to an impartial audience.

Social Work Implications

Children and families are being affected by divorce at tremendous rates. The study found that children are affected by parent alienation, enduring their parent's drawn out custody battles, and seeing their fathers inconsistently due to visiting games. Social work needs to find a way to help aide post divorce families, and to help rebuild homeostasis with a family system as well as a parental subsystem.

The majority of the participants reported having little to no communication with their ex wives in regards to their children. This creates two problems: no chance for homeostasis to be restored, and a very likely chance of triangulation. An example of the triangulation is parent alienation. This is especially dangerous because of heated custody battles in which the children are drawn into and forced to choose between two parents.

Social workers need to read the research and understand the experiences and the hurdles both parents go through in the divorce process. It is essential for two parents to recreate the parental subsystem post divorce in order to co-parent. This will also allow

for homeostasis with the family system as well as less triangulation. Children and their relationships with their parents will hopefully be healthier without the overwhelming tension.

REFERENCES

- Ahrons, C.R.(1981). The continuing coparental relationship between divorced spouses. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 5, 415-428.
- Anastas, J.W. (1999). *Research design for social work and the human services* (2nd Ed). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Arditti, J.A. (1995). Noncustodial parents: Emergent issues of diversity and process. *Marriage and Family Review*, 20(1-2), 283-304.
- Arendell, T. (1992). After divorce: Investigations into father absence. *Gender and Society*,6, 562-586.
- Arendell, T. (1995). *Fathers & divorce*. California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Bader, E. & Peterson, P.T. (1988). *In quest of a mystical mate: A developmental approach to diagnosis and treatment in couple therapy*. New York: Brunner Mazel.
- Baum, N. (2006). Postdivorce paternal disengagement: Failed mourning and role fusion. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 32(2), 245-254.
- Demo, D. & Ganong, M. (1994). Divorce. In P.McKenry & S. Price (Eds.), *Families and Change: Coping with stressful events* (pp. 197-218). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Dudley, J.R. (1991). Increasing our understanding of divorced fathers who have infrequent contact with their children. *Family Relations*, 40, 279-285.
- Dudley, J.R. (1996). Noncustodial fathers speak about their parental role. *Family and Conciliation Courts Review*, 34, 410-426.
- Dunn, J. (2004). Annotation: Children's relationships with their nonresident fathers. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 45(4), 659-671.
- Durst, P.L., Wedemeyer, N.V., & Zurcher, L.A. (1985). Parenting partnerships after divorce: Implications for practice. *National Association of Social Workers*, 30(5), 423-427.
- Fox, G.L. (1985). Noncustodial fathers. In S.M.H Hanson & F.W. Bozett (Eds.), *Dimensions of fatherhood*. Beverly Hills, (pp. 394-415). California: Sage.
- Fox, G.L. & Blanton, P.W. (1995). Noncustodial fathers following divorce. *Marriage & Family Review*, 20(1-2), 257-282.

- Furstenberg, F.F. & Nord, C.W. (1985). Parent apart: Patterns of childrearing after marital disruption. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 47, 893-904.
- Furstenberg, F.F., Nord, C.W., Peterson, J.L., Zill, N. (1983). The life course of children of divorce: Marital disruption and parental contact. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 656-668.
- Goldenberg, I. & Goldenberg, H. (2004). *Family Therapy an Overview* (6th Ed). California: Thomson.
- Greif, G. (1995). When divorced fathers want no contact with their children: A preliminary analysis. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 23(1/2), 75-84.
- Hetherington, E.M. (1993). An overview of the Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage with a focus on early adolescence. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7, 39-56.
- Hetherington, E.M, Cox, M., & Cox, R. (1976). Divorced fathers. *Family Coordinator*, 26, 417-428.
- Hetherington, E.M., Cox, M., & Cox, R. (1978). The aftermath of divorce. In J.H. Stevens & M. Matthews (Eds.), *Mother/child, father/child relationships* (pp.149-176). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Hobbs, T. (2002). Parent alienation syndrome and UK family courts. Part 1. *Family Law*, 32, 182-189.
- Jacobs, J. (1983). Treatment of divorcing fathers: Social and psychotherapeutic considerations. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 140, 1294-1299.
- King, V. (1994). Nonresident father involvement and child well-being. *Journal of Family Issues*, 15, 78-96.
- Krause, H.D. (1990). Child support reassessed: Limits of private responsibility and the public interest. *Family Law Quarterly*, 24, 1-34.
- Kruk, E. (1992). Psychological and structural factors contributing to the disengagement of noncustodial fathers after divorce. *Family and Conciliation Courts Review*, 30(1), 81-101.
- Kruk, E. (1994). The disengaged noncustodial father. Implications for social work practice with the divorced family. *Social Work*, 36(1), 15-25.

- Leite, R.W. & McKenry, P.C. (2002) Aspects of father status and postfather involvement with children. *Journal of Family Issues*, 23(5), 601-623.
- Lund, M. (1987). The non-custodial father: Common challenges in parenting after divorce. In C. Lewis and M. O'Brien (Eds.), *Reassessing fatherhood: New observations on fathers and the modern family* (pp. 212-224). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Maccoby, E. and Mnookin, H. (1992). *Dividing the child: Social and legal dilemmas of custody*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Marsiglio, W. (1991). Paternal engagement activities with minor children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 973-986.
- Marsiglio, W. (1992). Stepfathers with minor children living at home. *Journal of Family Issues*, 13, 195-214.
- Nichols, M.P., & Schwartz, R.C. (2005). *Essentials of Family Theory* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.
- Nichols, M. P., & Schwartz, R. C. (2006). *Family therapy concepts and methods* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Padgett, D.K. (1998). *Qualitative Methods in Social work Research Challenges and Rewards*. California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Paradise, J.E., Rostain, A.L., & Nathanson, M. (1988). Substantiation of sexual abuse charges when parents dispute custody or visitation. *Pediatrics*, 82(6), 835-839.
- Pleck, J.H. (1997). Paternal involvement: levels, sources, and consequences. In M.E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of father in child development* (3rd ed., pp. 66-103). New York: John Wiley.
- Seltzer, J.A. (1990). Legal and physical custody arrangements in recent divorces. *Social Sciences Quarterly*, 71, 250-266.
- Seltzer, J.A. (1991). Relationships between fathers and children who live apart: The father's role after separation. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 79-101.
- Seltzer, J.A. (1998). Father by law: Effects of joint legal custody on nonresident fathers' involvement with children. *Demography*, 34(2), 135-146.
- Seltzer, J.A. & Bianchi, S.M. (1988). Children's contact with absent parents. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50, 663-667.

Seltzer, J.A. & Brandreth, Y. (1994). What fathers say about involvement with children after separation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 15(1), 49-77.

Wallerstein, J. & Blakeslee, S. (1989). *Second chances: Men, women, and children a decade after divorce*. New York: Ticknor and Fields.

Wallerstein, J. & Kelly, J. (1980). *Surviving the breakup: How children and parents cope with divorce*. New York: Basic Books.

Appendix A Recruitment Letter

Rachel Green
1427 Vine Street, 8th Floor, Mail Stop 984
Philadelphia, PA 19102
(215) 762-3984

Date:

I am a second year master's student at Smith College School for Social Work in Northampton, Ma. I am conducting a study that will look at what a nonresidential father's perception of how his relationship with his children has been influenced by a divorce which the father considers to have been acrimonious.

The purpose of this study is to develop a greater understanding of how nonresidential fathers perceive their relationships with their children after a divorce. For the purpose of this study, the term nonresidential fathers refers to fathers of biological or adopted children who are no longer living in their child's home due to divorce.

The information obtained from the interviews as well as from the literature will be interpreted and explored in order to better understand the impact of an acrimonious divorce on a father and how that impacts his family relations. Data gathered from this study will be interpreted, and then used in professional publications and presentations on this topic. This will also be submitted, as a thesis, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Social work.

The participants will be divorced men who are nonresidential fathers. Participants will be men who consider their divorces to have been acrimonious. Each participant will have at least one child between the ages of 6 and 12. Their children can be biological or adopted. These fathers will also need to have joint legal custody and partial physical custody. Divorce proceeding must have been completed between the years of 2000 and 2005. The participants may be any race, religion, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. Men who are not conversant in English will be excluded from the study. There will be approximately 13-15 nonresidential fathers participating in the study.

You, as a participant in this study, will take part in a confidential interview that will be approximately one and a half hours. Interviews will take place at local public libraries and the researcher's office. Both locations are secluded, to ensure privacy. You will be asked questions regarding your perceptions on your relationships with your spouses prior to, during, and after your divorce. You will also be asked questions regarding your current relationships with your children. At the end of the interview you will be asked to reflect on your divorce experience and if you could, what would you change and what do you think the outcome of the change would be.

If you think you may be willing to participate and want to know more about this research project, please contact me at the above address or phone number with any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your time,

Rachel Green

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

I am a master's student at Smith College School for Social Work in Northampton, MA. I am conducting a study that will examine how divorce influences a nonresidential father's perception of his relationship with his children. The participants will be divorced men who are nonresidential fathers. Participants will be men who consider their divorces to have been acrimonious. Each participant will have at least one child between the ages of 6 and 12. Their children can be biological or adopted. These fathers will also need to have joint legal custody and partial physical custody. Divorce proceeding must have been completed between the years of 2000 and 2005. The participants may be any race, religion, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity.

The purpose of this study is to develop a greater understanding of how nonresidential fathers perceive their relationships with their children after a divorce. For the purpose of this study, the term nonresidential fathers who are no longer living in their child's home due to divorce. The information obtained from the interviews as well as from the literature will be interpreted and explored in order to better understand the impact of an acrimonious divorce on a father and how that impacts his family relations. Data gathered from this study will be interpreted, and then used in professional publications and presentations on this topic. This will also be submitted, as a thesis, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Social work.

The Nature of Participation

You will be take part in an interview that will be approximately one and a half hours, and will be recorded. Interviews will take place at local public libraries and the researcher's office. Both locations are secluded for the purpose of the interview to ensure privacy. You will be asked to fill out a brief questionnaire, including years since divorce, household income prior to divorce, race, religion, age, etc. You will be asked questions regarding your perception and definitions of fatherhood before and after your divorce, nature of the divorce proceedings, court outcome, etc. Additionally, you will not be paid for your participation in the study. You will have to arrange and pay for your own transportation.

Risks of Participation

There will be minimal risks in the participation of this study. You may experience distress when recalling memories or reflecting on your behavior and experiences. Due to this risk, a list of referrals to mental health providers will be given at the end of the interview.

Your identity will be confidential, however, there are three circumstances in which ethically and legally I would break confidentiality. Those three reasons are: if you have plans to harm yourself, if you plan on harming another, or if you disclose information regarding the abuse of children.

Benefits of Participation

You may gain further understanding and insight about how your divorce process impacts your relationship with your children. This insight may help enhance your relationships with your children.

Parts of the interviews, as well as additional data collected for this study will be a part of a public presentation and publication. The information may help better inform legal and therapeutic interventions for families suffering from divorce.

Precautions Taken to Safeguard Confidentiality and identifiable Information

All the interviews will be recorded on a digital recorder. The interview on the recorder will be downloaded to the computer and then erased. The researcher will listen to the audiotapes in private, as will another transcriber who will also listen to the tapes privately. The transcriber will be asked to sign a confidentiality pledge. Each participant will be assigned a number in place of any identifying information to ensure confidentiality. You will also be asked to not use real names of others, such as your ex partner’s and your children, again to ensure confidentiality.

All information such as the memory stick, transcripts, as well as relevant papers and notes will be kept in a locked box and stored in the researcher’s apartment. This box will remain stored in her apartment for three years as required by federal guidelines. After three years the researcher will have all information destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the option of choosing to not answer specific or all of the questions in the study. You may withdraw from the interview by April 20, 2007. You will be given the researcher’s email and work number if you need to contact her with any concerns regarding the study, or to withdraw from the study after the interview is conducted.

Please keep a copy of this signed document for your records.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICPATE IN THE STUDY.

Signature of Participant:

Date:

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

Researcher’s Contact:

Rachel Green

1427 Vine Street, 8th Floor, Mail Stop 984 Philadelphia, PA 19102

Rgreen@email.smith.edu

(215) 762-3984

Appendix C
Demographic Information

Participant Identification Number: _____

Demographic Information

1. What is your age? _____

2. What race do you identify yourself as? _____

3. What is your ethnic background? _____

4. What income range do you fall in to: (Circle one)

0-24,999

25,000-49,999

50,000-74,999

75,000-100,000

Over 100, 000

5. What is your educational background? _____

6. What is your most recent occupation? _____

7. How many years were you married? _____

8. How many years have you been divorced? _____

9. Who filed for divorce, you or your ex spouse? _____

10. Did you and your ex spouse have a trial separation prior to divorce? _____

11. How long did the divorce process last? _____

12. How many children do you have and what are their ages and gender? _____

13. Please describe current living arrangements: apartment or house? Rented, owned?

Who do you live with? _____

14. What were you living in prior to the divorce: apartment or house? Rented, owned?

Who did you live with? _____

15. Do your children and ex spouse currently live in your old residency? If not, why?

How far away do your children live from you? _____

Appendix D

Interview Questions

- 1.) Please describe the type of interactions, such as eating dinner together, that you had with your children before the divorce, including the quality of the interactions as well as the frequency.
- 2.) Please describe the steps leading up to the divorce, if any, such as separation.
- 3.) Please describe the divorce process (contact/quality relationship with kids, interactions with ex spouse, personal stress/mood overall), including the involvement of lawyers, if that applies. If there were no lawyers involved, what was the reasoning?
- 4.) What were the terms of your divorce, such as your visitation rights, alimony?
- 5.) Please describe the type of interactions that you have with your children since the divorce, including quality of interactions as well as frequency.
- 6.) Please describe your relationship with your ex spouse during the course of the divorce proceedings.
- 7.) Please describe your current relationship with your ex spouse, as well as your feelings towards her.
- 8.) In your opinion, has your nonresidential status affected your relationship with your children?
- 9.) What aspects of your life (post divorce) have affected your relationship?
- 10.) If you could change any of your actions before divorce, during divorce, or directly after, what would they be?
- 11.) What do you see for the future, in terms of your relationship with your children, relationship with your ex spouse, and who you yourself will become?

Appendix E Referral List

Individual Therapist

1. Robert Crawford, *EdD, MS, LPC, BCETS*
Diplomate, The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress
Nationally Board Certified Counselor

Connections Counseling and Consultation
44 Cooper Street, Suite 114, Woodbury, NJ 08096
Office Phone: 856 - 845 - 4447
<http://www.myspace.com/connectionsounseling>

2. Dr. Macia Polansky, *ScD, MSW, LSW*
1518 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102
(856) 465-7598

3. PsyCare Solutions Inc, *PhD, LCSW, LMFT, LPC, MA*
1616 Walnut Street
Suite 1514
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19130
(215) 885-9700
(Some therapists within agency offer treatment on a sliding scale.)

4. The Consortium Inc
3801 Market Street, Suite 201
Philadelphia, PA 19104
(215) 596-8163
(Agency offers clients treatment on a sliding scale.)

5. The Men's Resource Center
2100 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 564-0488

6. Greater Philadelphia Center for Social Therapy
245 S. 16th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102
(215) 957- 5073

Appendix F
HSR Approval Letter

January 7, 2007

Rachel Green
1427 Vine Street, 8th Floor
Mail Stop 984,
Philadelphia, PA 19102-1192

Dear Rachel,

Your amended documents have been reviewed and are complete. You have done a very careful job of revision and we are now happy to give final approval to your study.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project. This is a very useful study. This whole area is one that is of great concern to social workers who so frequently see various family members after a painful divorce or try to help families through a divorce so that it won't be too damaging to children.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

Cc: Yoosun Park, Research Advisor