

## Clinical Sociology Review

---

Volume 3 | Issue 1

Article 20

---

1-1-1985

# Parting: The Aftermath of Separation and Divorce / Recycling the Family: Remarriage after Divorce

Charles Lee Cole  
*Iowa State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Cole, Charles Lee () "Parting: The Aftermath of Separation and Divorce / Recycling the Family: Remarriage after Divorce," *Clinical Sociology Review*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 20.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr/vol3/iss1/20>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@WayneState. It has been accepted for inclusion in Clinical Sociology Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@WayneState.

**Parting: The Aftermath of Separation and Divorce**, by Graham B. Spanier and Linda Thompson. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1984, 310 pp., \$25.00.

**Recycling the Family: Remarriage After Divorce**, Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. and Graham B. Spanier. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1984, 228 pp., \$25.00.

*Charles Lee Cole*  
*Iowa State University*

Not since the 1960 publication of Blood and Wolfe's classic book have we seen a benchmark research monograph that is widely cited in both the research literature and in family sociology textbooks. I predict that Spanier and his associates, Linda Thompson and Frank Furstenberg, have produced a two-volume research report on divorce adjustment and remarriage that will be to the divorce and remarriage literature what Blood and Wolfe's research has been to the family power literature. Spanier and his colleagues have produced a highly readable report of their longitudinal research on marital separation and divorce and on the process of moving into a subsequent marriage.

In *Parting*, Spanier and Thompson blend the richness of qualitative data from in-depth case studies with quantitative research data. Their goal is to describe the aftermath of divorce, beginning with the marital separation processes. The book is a culmination of a longitudinal research project in Pennsylvania conducted by Spanier and his colleagues in the mid and late seventies.

Spanier's interests in demography and family history come through in both *Parting* and *Recycling the Family*. Both monographs draw heavily upon census data and an attempt is made to establish a solid basis for comparing and contrasting current trends in marital separation and remarriage with data reported in other studies, such as Goode's (1956) classic study of divorce.

As the authors point out, projections from census data suggest that marriage has remained a cultural norm in the United States with over 90% of all adults marrying at least once. Furthermore, they suggest that about half of all first marriages formed in recent years will end in divorce and that three-fourths of all divorced persons enter a subsequent marriage relationship. Despite the fact that divorce and remarriage have become normative in American society, few sociological studies have been published in this important area of research.

Spanier and Thompson examine not only the social-psychological but also the economic and legal factors that accompany the marital separation and divorce processes. The role of outsiders and of the extramarital sexual affair are examined with regard to the marital separation process. Not surprisingly, over a third

(38.5% of the men, and 37.8% of the women) of Spanier and Thompson's respondents had engaged in extramarital affairs before the divorce. They suggest that there is a reciprocal relationship between extramarital affairs and marital dissolution. When either or both marital partners begin to perceive that their needs are not being met within the marriage, they begin to look outside the marriage to get them met.

Spanier and Thompson also report that reactions to marital separation and divorce range from feelings of relief at being out of a bad marriage to feelings of confusion and distress. For some there are feelings of guilt, anger and loneliness, while for others there are feelings of ambivalence that need to be sorted out before the marital separation can be accepted. The emotional processes of ending and leaving a failing marriage are experienced differently by the partner leaving and the partner being left. There is usually a lag in the acceptance for the dumpee.

The relationship with the ex-spouse is examined by Spanier and Thompson to determine if distinct patterns exist. They found that among women there was a consistent link between the quality of the marriage in waning months prior to the separation and the quality of the postmarital relationship between former spouses. As the authors point out, the partnership between husband and wife does not end with separation but rather is carried over in memory and reconstructed accounts of the relationship.

The vast majority of their respondents received moral, and/or physical support from family and friends after the marital separation and divorce. The love and acceptance of significant others help to provide emotional support and build self-esteem during the fragile periods of marital separation and divorce. Thus, the support networks of the formerly married are extremely important in helping to buffer the distress of a marital breakup. It is noted in *Parting* that dating and becoming sexually involved with members of the opposite sex can be anxiety producing and awkward for the recently separated and divorced since they are out of practice negotiating the dating market. Dating can function as a distraction from the pain of the marital separation, and it can serve the function of filling the void of having a significant other to confide in and enjoy sharing the comforts of sexual intimacy. Sexual involvement usually progresses at a fairly rapid pace in relationships with the opposite sex among the formerly married.

In Furstenberg and Spanier's *Recycling the Family*, data from the follow-up study of divorced persons that were part of Spanier's study reported in Spanier and Thompson's *Parting* are presented. Like the Spanier and Thompson book, Furstenberg and Spanier's book details the theory and methodology of their study so that the reader can gain an appreciation for not only the complexities of the study but also for the methodological rigor and conceptual clarity of the research.

Although *Parting* is richer in terms of the breadth of empirical data presented, *Recycling the Family* is richer in terms of theory development. One of

the unique contributions of Furstenberg and Spanier's work is a creative theoretical essay that details their theory of conjugal succession. According to their explanation of conjugal succession, the pattern of family formation has changed from marriage serving primarily as a rite of passage that demarcates the transition from childhood to adulthood. Marriage is viewed less as a goal or static state and instead becomes conceptualized as a relationship process independent of other life course events and as a more voluntary and less permanent structure. They contend that marriage in contemporary society has changed and that as expectations have risen for the marital relationship to meet the emotional needs of both partners, fewer couples are willing to remain in unsatisfying relationships.

Remarriage is very different from first marriage. The experience of having been in an unsuccessful marriage and having endured marital conflict contributes to a redefinition of subsequent marriages, whereby expectations and standards are altered in light of the previous experience. As Berger and Kellner (1964) note, the plausibility structure has to be altered whereby individuals who have experienced marital failure will see subsequent marital opportunities as resulting in a positive outcome. There is less likelihood that remarriages are begun with the same degree of idealized images as are first marriages. Furstenberg and Spanier draw upon phenomenological theory in developing explanations for the process of constructing a shared reality by remarried couples.

Furstenberg and Spanier challenge Cherlin's (1978) incomplete institutionalization of remarriage hypothesis that predicts remarriages are less stable than first marriages because of increased conflicts, which are endemic to remarriage situations, the lack of normative guidelines for remarriage, the overall increased complexity of remarriage with children and inlaws, etc. According to Furstenberg and Spanier, the explanation for the increased likelihood of marital dissolution of second marriages is tied to the unique biographical characteristics of those who remarry and to the remarriage process.

In both *Parting* and *Recycling the Family*, the importance of realistic marital expectations is pointed out. Retrospective accounts of marital failures consistently point to a lack of communication skills which, in turn, inhibit self-other disclosures and thus rob the couple of the opportunity to develop what Mace (1982) calls "relationship depth." With relationship depth, mutual trust and understanding increase, fostering respect and caring and thus encouraging the development and maintenance of relationship growth. It is also clear that the ability to creatively handle differences and resolve conflict is critical in developing a successful marriage.

In summary, I see these two volumes as perhaps the finest examples of sociological research in the family field published in over a decade. Clinical sociologists will find the vast wealth of empirical findings and richly interwoven theoretical explanations a virtual gold mine.

## REFERENCES

- Berger, P., and H. Kellner.  
 1964 *Marriage and the Construction of Reality*. In R. L. Coser (Ed.), *The Family: Its Structures and Functions*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Blood, R. O., and D. M. Wolfe.  
 1960 *Husbands and Wives*. New York: The Free Press.
- Cherlin, A.  
 1978 "Remarriage as incomplete institutionalization," *American Journal of Sociology* 84.634-650.
- Goode, W. J.  
 1956 *Women in Divorce*. New York: The Free Press.
- Mace, D. R.  
 1982 *Close Companions*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company

**Changing the Subject**, by J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn, and V. Walkerdine. New York: Methuen, 1984, 360 pp., \$37.50 hardcover, \$15.95 paperback.

*Joan D. Atwood*  
*Hofstra University*

*William R. Atwood*  
*Auxton Computer Enterprises, Inc., Edison, NY*

"We now have tools for examining the relations between the social processes which regulate us and the psychic functioning of individuals. In contrast to what psychoanalysis can offer, these processes are in principle ones to which we can all gain access. They are the stuff of our daily lives; they are material for struggle" (p. 322). These sentences end *Changing the Subject* an extensive book written by five British psychologists who charge themselves with the task of rewriting some basic tenets of the social sciences. The book includes three sections, each consisting of two essays. These are: (Part I) "Psychological Assessment in Organizations" (Industrial Psychology) and "Social Psychology and the Politics of Racism"; (Part II) "The Subject of Psychology" and "Developmental Psychology and the Child Centered Pedagogy: Insertion of Piaget into Early Education"; (Part III) "Gender Differences and the Production of Subjectivity" and "Power Relations and the Emergence of Language."

The main thesis of the book is basically to argue for "the theoretical inadequacy of the concepts of a pre-social individual and a preformed social world" (p. 8). The authors first critique the "individual-society dualism and its effects upon psychological theory and practices." Second, they develop what they term "alternative perspectives which show psychology's part in the practices of social