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UNDERSTANDING NONRESIDENTIAL FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP PROCESSES DURING EMERING ADULTHOOD

A Dissertation

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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UNDERSTANDING NONRESIDENTIAL FATHER-CHILD

RELATIONSHIP PROCESSES DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For several decades, researchers have chronicled the effects of divorce on children and identified the processes that facilitate resiliency in post-divorce families (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Amato, 2010; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kelly & Emery, 2003). This literature has focused mainly on the wellbeing of children and adolescents whose parents divorce, but considerable evidence suggests that the transition to adulthood may also be a time when the quality of post-divorce family relationships affects individuals' outcomes (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Nielson, 2011). In particular, scholars have found that maintaining frequent, emotionally warm contact with both parents is beneficial across the developmental stages of childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood (Kelly, 2007; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Menning, 2006).

The transition to adulthood poses particular challenges and vulnerabilities that are aided by emotional and financial support from parents. Arnett (2000, 2004) described emerging adulthood as a period between the ages of 18 and 25 that is marked by identity exploration and opportunity as well as relational and financial instability. Positive contact with parents has been found to increase self-esteem, improve life satisfaction, and lower psychological distress as emerging adults pursue higher education and other goals (Finley & Schwartz, 2010). However, compared to emerging adults with married parents, those with divorced parents are less likely to have frequent contact with either parent, and maintaining contact with fathers is especially challenging (Arnett, 2004; Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, & Greenbaum, 2009; Gerson, 2010; Nielsen, 2011). Physical custody arrangements that favor mothers as primary post-divorce caretakers create barriers to

father-child contact during childhood and may influence father-child relationships in emerging adulthood.

Unlike when they were younger, emerging adults have more, albeit not complete, control over contact with their nonresidential fathers (i.e., fathers with whom they live less than 50% of the time post-divorce). Those with less contact whether by their choice, the father’s choice, or as a result of their mother’s attempts to control access, feel less supported, have more symptoms of depression, and have weaker academic achievement than emerging adults who have supportive contact with their fathers (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Mattanah, Lopez, & Govern, 2011). There is clear empirical evidence that emerging adults’ relationships with their nonresidential fathers are important to their wellbeing (Amato, 2010; Nielsen, 2011). What remains unclear is *how* emerging adults maintain or change their relationships with their nonresidential fathers when they turn 18 and are no longer subject to the custody arrangements outlined in their parents’ legal divorce agreement. The purpose of this study is to explore the processes by which emerging adults attempt to maintain or change their relationships with their nonresidential fathers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The divorce literature reflects two distinct approaches to studying the impact of divorce on families. Much of the early research compared children involved in highly stressful parental divorces to children whose parents were always married. Ganong and Coleman (1984) identified this as a deficit-comparison perspective. The underlying assumption of this perspective is that children whose parents divorced will be worse off than children with married parents because they are denied the stability they need and desire (Cherlin, 2009). Therefore, it was assumed that divorce-related changes within families create stress that fosters declines in children's mental and physical health (Clark, Caldwell, Power, & Stansfeld, 2010; Pearlin, Schieman, Fazio, & Meersman, 2005).

In the last two decades, many researchers have begun to use a strengths-based perspective that focuses on children who are resilient to the stressors of divorce. Amato (2000; 2010) refers to this body of research as the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective. The divorce-stress-adjustment perspective frames marital dissolution as a process that occurs over time. Children's academic, emotional and behavioral wellbeing is impacted by the stressors that occur throughout the divorce process, including before and after the legal divorce. A relatively small proportion of children suffer long-term negative consequences due to this stress, but others are resilient (Ahrons, 2007). Both bodies of research, one focusing on deficits associated with divorce stress and one focusing on resiliency, have provided valuable information on how divorce affects children's wellbeing. However, the proposed study will be guided by a divorce-stress-adjustment perspective.

Research on the outcomes of divorce has focused primarily on the short-term effects of marital dissolution on children and adolescents (Ahrons, 2007). However, widespread concern about the wellbeing of children in post-divorce families led researchers to conduct several longitudinal studies addressing divorce related outcomes over time (most notably Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Hetherington, 1992; Wallerstein, 1991). While these longitudinal studies varied widely in their methodology and results, they generally found that divorce affects children differently depending on their age at the time of divorce. With respect to adulthood, all three studies found that as children got older, the long-term impact of a parental divorce varied depending on family context (e.g., level of conflict). Ahrons and Tanner also found that adults' outcomes depended upon normative developmental changes (e.g., shifting parental roles in adult children's lives). Although the acute stressors of divorce (e.g., adjusting to life in two households) may have long abated, the relationships between young adults and their parents remain important. This may be particularly true for emerging adults, who may need additional family support as they navigate new responsibilities and freedoms associated with adulthood, while retaining some of the needs of adolescents such as parental emotional and financial support (Arnett, 2004).

Emerging Adulthood

Researchers have debated whether emerging adulthood is a developmental stage or simply an artifact of studying American college students (see Arnett, 2004; Hendry & Kloep, 2007). What makes the notion of emerging adulthood controversial as a stage in the life course is that it is experienced differently based on societal norms and social class (Arnett, 2011; Larson, Wilson, & Rickman, 2009). Arnett posited that emerging

adulthood existed only under certain demographic conditions such as widespread post-secondary education and delaying marriage and parenthood until the late 20's (Arnett, 2011).

Since the publication of Arnett's original article defining emerging adulthood, there has been substantial work in the fields of family studies and developmental psychology dedicated to further defining and understanding this hypothesized stage in the life cycle. Research on young adults, particularly those in college, is abundant, but college students are not necessarily emerging adults, especially if they are married or completely independent from their parents. However, researchers have found that young adults from a variety of backgrounds and social classes experience the parental dependence, identity exploration, and instability that characterize emerging adulthood (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Arnett, 2011; Douglass, 2005; Jensen, 2011; Jones & Ramdas, 2004; Phinney & Baldelomar, 2011).

In the United States, emerging adulthood has been identified as existing across social classes, however, those in wealthier families experience emerging adulthood for a longer period of time. Regardless of economic status, American youth experience high hopes, instability, and trying out different possibilities in love and work; these are central aspects of the emerging adult experience as defined by Arnett (2011). After the age of 25, most working class individuals gradually move towards stable commitments in work and family and no longer experience emerging adulthood, while middle and upper class individuals tend to continue as emerging adults until they are nearly 30 (Arnett, 2004; Arnett, 2011). In sum, the experience of emerging adulthood is widespread though it may be longer or shorter depending on social class.

Developmental needs of emerging adults. Tanner (2006) argued that emerging adulthood is a distinct juncture in human development when multiple identity-forming life events occur, when persons generally are at their peaks in health and fitness (Park, Mulye, Adams, Brindis, & Irwin, 2006), and when substance abuse and sexual risk-taking may peak (Tanner & Arnett, 2009). In order to accomplish the developmental tasks of completing formal education and advancing in a career, parental financial and emotional support are often needed (Tanner, 2006; Tanner & Arnett, 2009). Although a lack of well-paying jobs often makes emerging adults generally dependent on their parents for financial contributions, emerging adults who are also college students are particularly dependent on their parents for large expenses such as college tuition (Arnett, 2004). College students are also unlikely to be married or to have stable romantic partners, making them reliant on parents for emotional support (Arnett, 2007a). Thus, emerging adults, especially college students, have specific financial and emotional needs that are often met by their parents.

For emerging adults, financial and emotional support is obtained through frequent and supportive interactions with their parents (Pettit, Roberts, Lewinson, Seely, & Yaroslavsky, 2011; Sarason & Sarason, 2009). Despite heavy involvement with peers during this life period, emotional support from parents is more valuable than the emotional support that they obtain from their friends (Pettit et al., 2011). Balancing newfound autonomy in some areas with continued dependence in others can be a source of conflict between parents and emerging adults (Aquilino, 2006). However, most are closer to and share more information with their parents than do adolescents (Arnett, 2007b; Richards, Crowe, Larson, & Swarr 1998), particularly when they no longer live

together (Arnett, 2007b; Dubas & Petersen, 1996). Supportive contact with parents bolsters well-being for many emerging adults, lowers rates of depression (Burleson, 2009; Finely & Swartz, 2010; Sarason & Sarason, 2009; Vangelisti, 2009), and increases college retention and graduation rates (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Inoue, 1999: McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Radford, Berkner, Wheeless, & Shepherd, 2010).

Emerging adults with divorced parents

Each year nearly one million children experience parental divorce, and over 25% of freshman in American colleges have reported that their parents are no longer married to each other (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Blake, & Tran, 2009). Emerging adults cite parental divorce as the most common traumatic family transition they have experienced (Arnett, 2004), yet little research has focused on their needs (for exceptions see Amato, 2004; Nielsen, 2006), or explored the factors that facilitate resilience among this group. When compared to emerging adults with married parents, those whose parents divorced during their childhood have been shown to experience poorer outcomes. Specifically, they have trouble forming and maintaining romantic attachments (Cartwright, 2006; Kilmann, 2006; Kirk, 2002; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002; Weigel, 2007), have poorer mental health (Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, & Kiernan, 1995), have trouble controlling their emotions, have trouble calming down in the face of acute stressors (Conway, Christensen, & Herlihy, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002), have worse relationships with their parents (particularly daughters with fathers; Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Aquilino, 1994; Booth & Amato, 2001; Emery, 2004; Knox, Zusman, & DeCuzzi, 2004; Nielsen, 2011), and have lower achievements in both school and work (Amato & Keith, 1991; Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001). In short, emerging adults who experienced a parental

divorce during their childhood are more likely to have social and academic problems when compared to those whose parents were continuously married (Amato, 2010; Emery, 1999; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kelly, 2000).

However, the assumption that divorce causes long-term distress in all families is misguided. The vast majority of children (75-80%) whose parents divorce become healthy, high-functioning adults (Ahrons, 2007). Nearly one third of emerging adults have reported that their parents' divorce had a positive effect on their families, while only 26% reported that the effect was negative (Knox et al., 2004). Researchers using a divorce-stress-adjustment perspective have found that experiencing a parental divorce is stressful and associated with modest, short-term decreases in the emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for many children (Barber & Demo, 2006; Braver, Shapiro, & Goodman, 2006; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Yet, the long-term differences between children whose parents are divorced and children whose parents have been continuously married are often modest (Kelly, 2012). Rather than experiencing only loss, some post-divorce families also experience growth and newfound appreciation for the family they have (Knonstam, 2009). For many children, parental divorce can result in positive experiences despite the presence of divorce-related stressors, especially when the divorce reduces family conflict (Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, & Greenbaum, 2009; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

Facilitating resiliency through parental contact. There is an extensive body of literature documenting the association between supportive parent-child contact and positive post-divorce outcomes in children and adolescents (Amato, 2010; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Supportive contact between emerging adults and their parents has also

been found to facilitate resiliency following divorce including experiencing fewer feelings of loss (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000), and closer relationships with fathers (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008) and mothers (Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius & Luecken, 2007). Those with positive parent-child relationships have also been shown to suffer fewer stress-related illnesses (e.g., insomnia, headaches, chest pains, and intestinal problems; Fabricius & Luecken, 2007; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000) and had a more favorable view of the family's post-divorce years (Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius & Luecken; Laumann & Emery, 2000; Schwartz & Finley, 2005) than individuals with less consistent contact with their parents.

Maintaining positive parent-child relationships post-divorce is often more complicated than maintaining parent-child relationships in first married families (Arnett, 2004; Nielsen, 2011). It is unlikely, for example, that both divorced parents had the opportunity for equal involvement with their children as they grew into emerging adults (Schwartz & Finley, 2009, 2010), which can be problematic (Finley & Schwartz, 2010). When compared to those whose parents had equal levels of involvement, emerging adults whose parents had stark differences in involvement levels (e.g., one parent with high involvement and one parent with low involvement) had lower levels of self-esteem, lower life satisfaction, lower friendship quality, higher levels of distress, and more romantic relationship problems (Finley & Schwartz, 2010).

In sum, supportive parent-child contact post-divorce has a demonstrated positive effect on the outcomes of children and emerging adults, which has prompted the establishment of physical custody arrangements that promote regular contact between both parents and their children. These custody arrangements influence parent-child

contact during childhood and adolescence, as well as shape the relationships that exist during emerging adulthood (Kelly, 2012; Finley & Schwartz, 2010).

Influences on parent-child contact

There is a well-developed literature on the importance of supportive contact between children and both of their parents in post-divorce families (see Kelly, 2012). Establishing and maintaining parent-child contact post-divorce, however, is influenced by many environmental and developmental factors (Kelly, 2007; 2012). Immediately following parental divorce, the primary method for establishing parent-child contact is through family courts, specifically physical custody arrangements (Fabricius, Sokol, Diaz, & Braver, 2012; Kelly, 2004). However, over time the roles and actions of both parents become important factors in facilitating or inhibiting contact between parents and their children (Kelly, 2007). As children develop, they too begin to exercise control over the amount of time they spend with their parents, particularly when they get a driver's license. The child's control intensifies when he or she turns 18 and is no longer bound to follow the legal guidelines set forth in the divorce agreement (Lux, 2010). This shift from legal guidelines to interpersonal methods for maintaining parental contact is an important process because it has implications for whether emerging adults maintain supportive contact with both parents, only one parent, or neither of their parents (Eldar-Avidan et al. 2009).

Physical custody arrangements. In the divorce decree, family courts designate divorced parents as either having *sole physical custody* (i.e., child lives with one resident parent and 'visits' the other; Nord & Zill, 1996) or *joint physical custody* (i.e., between 33% and 50% time with one parent, the remainder with the other; Kelly 2007). In an

effort to provide more frequent contact between children and both parents following divorce, the legal system increasingly favors joint physical custody over sole physical custody. Nationwide, only 5% of families had joint physical custody in the 1990's (Kelly, 2007). Today, joint physical custody rates range from 30% to 50% depending on the state (Fabricius et al, 2012; George, 2008; Melli & Brown, 2008; Venohr & Kaunelis, 2008).

Similar to sole physical custody, joint physical custody arrangements often still establish situations where children tend to live primarily with one parent (i.e., their mother) and spend less time with their other parent (i.e., their father; Kelly, 2007). Fully-equal joint physical custody arrangements (i.e., 50% split of children's time with parents) are uncommon and tend to be unstable (Braver, Ellman, Votruba, & Fabricius, 2011; Kelly, 2012; McIntosh & Smyth, 2012). So, despite changes in the legal system, mothers are still far more likely than fathers to be the primary or residential parent (Kelly, 2012). Nearly three quarters of college students with divorced parents said that their mother had been their primary caretaker (Ferrante, Stolberg, Wacie, & Williams, 2008). Less than 7% of children spend more than 25% of their time with their fathers after divorce (Kelly, 2012), and 23% of college students reported spending no time with their fathers after their parents divorced (Ferrante et al., 2008). Although the amount of nonresidential father-child contact has increased in the last decade (Amato, Meyers, & Emery, 2009), the overall percentage of American children living primarily with their mothers has remained relatively stable for over three decades (Kelly, 2007). In sum, debates about increasing parent-child contact in post-divorce families would be more accurately described as debates about increasing nonresidential father-child contact.

Researchers have found that residential mothers have a considerable amount of influence over nonresidential fathers' access to children (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011). This influence is increased when parents informally alter the physical custody arrangements after the divorce is finalized (Kaspiew, Gray, Weston, Moloney, Hand, & Qu, 2009). These informal adjustments are not part of the parenting plan and make nonresident fathers dependent on the residential mothers' goodwill for time and access to children (Braver & Griffin, 2000; Ganong, Coleman, & McCaulley, 2012). Researchers have referred to the process of limiting a nonresidential father's access to children as *restrictive gatekeeping* (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Ganong et al., 2012; Trinder, 2008). Although some mothers facilitate greater nonresidential father-child contact (facilitative gatekeeping; see Ganong et al., 2012), other mothers believe that women are better caregivers and are more competent with children; these mothers are more likely to use gatekeeping methods that keep father-child contact low (Adamsons, 2010; Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003).

Nonresidential fatherhood. Despite their diminished access and the restrictive gatekeeping of some residential mothers, many nonresidential fathers maintain regular contact with their children (Kelly, 2007; 2012). Consistent father-child contact has been found to be important for children as well as emerging adults (Leite & McKenry, 2002; Braver & Griffin, 2000; Pasley & Minton, 1997; Ahrons & Miller, 1993), yet nonresidential fathers have a fairly negative reputation with respect to the time and resources they provide to their children following divorce. Research in the 1980's suggested that soon after divorce most nonresident fathers' decreased contact with their children to very low levels (Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983). In the early

1990's, Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991) and the U.S. Census (1995) concluded that the majority of fathers rarely saw their children and were unlikely to pay much child support. Paying child support was identified by some researchers as one of the most important functions of a nonresident father because it affects a child's socioeconomic status. Unpaid child support also often leads to coparental conflict, which is related to negative child outcomes (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004; Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1994; Garfinkel, McLanahan, & Robins, 1994; Kelly, 2012). The combination of fathers' lack of contact with children and their failure to financially provide for them fostered a negative reputation for nonresident fathers, leading to the widespread use of the label ''deadbeat dads'' (Furstenberg, 1988). Troilo and Coleman (2007) found that the stereotype of the "deadbeat dad" is still strong. A large sample of young adults rated nonresidential fathers more negatively than nearly every other type of father (e.g., gay father, stepfather).

Some nonresident fathers fit the negative stereotype described above. For example, Parkinson and Smyth (2004) found that 15% of fathers who had no contact with their children rated their time with their children as 'about right.' Of the 64% of nonresident fathers that had formal child support obligations in 2004, less than half paid the full amount (Grall, 2006). Nonetheless, there are many nonresident fathers who want to financially support and maintain contact with their children, and most nonresident fathers have positive attitudes about sharing care for their children (Smyth & Weston, 2004). Also, children of all ages (including emerging adults) have reported that they would like to have more contact with their nonresidential fathers (Baker, 2007; Fabricius, 2003). A better understanding of the nonresidential father-child relationship requires

investigation of the factors, beyond father's desire to parent, that contribute to contact between nonresidential parents and their children.

Barriers to nonresidential father-child contact. There are many factors that affect contact between children and their nonresidential fathers (Fabricius, Braver, Diaz, & Schenck, 2010; Kelly, 2012). Some factors are: Child gender (fathers spend more time with sons; Marsiglio et al., 2000), child temperament (Karraker & Coleman, 2005), father's education level (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2010), father's socioeconomic status (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004), father's incarceration status (Western, Lopoo, & McLanahan, 2004), father's physical distance from children (Braver & Cookston, 2003), and the father's level of early engagement with children (even during pregnancy; Cabrera, Fagan, & Farrie, 2008; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2010). Social institutions also influence nonresidential father-child contact. Doctors (Coleman, 2004), teachers, school counselors (Fagan & Hawkins, 2003), therapists, and social workers (Frieman, 2007; Sieber, 2008) have tended to exclude nonresidential fathers from parenting decisions. The relationship between parents is also important in determining nonresidential father-child contact (Feinberg, 2002; 2003; Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007). Fathers must be motivated to see their children and willing to work with the children's mother if they want to participate in parenting (Cabrera et al., 2004).

All of these factors vary depending on the ages of the children. Young children are bound by the physical custody arrangements outlined in the divorce decree and are often dependent on their mothers to facilitate contact with their fathers. As they get older, children may become more active agents in this process and, as emerging adults, take on an even more independent role in relationship maintenance with their fathers. These

changes are driven by normative developmental milestones, typically beginning during adolescence and continuing into adulthood.

***Adolescence*.** Maintaining nonresidential father-child contact can become more complicated as children transition from childhood into adolescence. Some adolescent children resist contact with nonresidential fathers because of the behaviors of the residential mother or nonresidential father (Fidler & Bala, 2010; Kelly & Johnson, 2001) and others simply reject their nonresidential fathers, especially if they were relatively absent from the adolescent's life pre- or post-divorce (Saini, Johnson, Fidler, & Bala, 2012). Overall, only a minority of adolescents maintain close relationships with their fathers post-divorce (Scott, Booth, King, & Johnson, 2007), and only those with strong pre-divorce father-child relationships maintained similar levels of trust in the nonresidential father post-divorce (King, 2002). Even fully-equal joint physical custody arrangements tend to be adjusted towards more time with mothers during adolescence because adolescents desire stable access to their peer groups and are more comfortable living with their mothers (Smart, 2004).

As children reach adolescence, parents tend to provide less structure and exercise less control over their children's decision-making (Bengtson & Allen, 1993; Fidler & Bala, 2010). Adolescents in some families, therefore, make more decisions about visiting or staying with their nonresidential fathers than younger children, particularly if they have a driver's license (Kerr, 2008). McIntosh and colleagues (2012) found that rigid physical custody arrangements that ignored adolescent desires were often associated with poorer child outcomes. In many families, this leads to a reduction in contact between adolescents and their fathers (Lux, 2010). Under the right circumstances, however,

resistance to contact with nonresidential fathers fades over time. Teenagers who felt that both their parents respected their autonomy were more likely to seek out contact with their fathers during late adolescence compared to those who felt their parents were overly strict about visitation (Fidler & Bala, 2010; Johnston, Roseby, & Kuehnle, 2009).

Adulthood. Post-divorce family dynamics change considerably once children become legal adults because many leave home, obtain greater autonomy from parents, and move towards more peer-like relationships with their parents (Ahrons, 2007; Arnett, 2004; 2007b). The research on outcomes for adults whose parents divorced when they were children has addressed two overlapping populations. Some researchers have studied the outcomes of childhood divorce on adults in general, using a wide age range; others focused more specifically on emerging adults. There is evidence that adult children's relationships with their nonresident fathers are fragile (Amato & Booth, 2006; Bengtson, Biblarz, & Roberts, 2002; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997) and that father-daughter relationships are particularly susceptible to long-term damage (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Quick father remarriage and the father's perceived lack of interest in maintaining contact were contributing factors to strained relationships between nonresidential fathers and their adult children. However, Ahrons (2006) found that 20 years after their parents divorced, over half (59%) of the adult children felt their relationships with their fathers had improved, whereas only one third reported that it had gotten worse (Ahrons, 2007).

Adults with greater parental involvement during childhood and a low conflict, high support environment post-divorce were more likely to have positive relationships with their nonresidential fathers compared to those who grew up in high conflict

situations (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003). A father-child relationship based on mutuality and equality was also beneficial for the relationship, as was blaming negative family memories on things that are no longer relevant, such as fathers' behaviors right after the divorce or the perceived maturity levels of parents or oneself at the time of the divorce (Ahrons, 2007; Ahrons & Tanner, 2003). Some adults have reported that they wish someone had insisted they have contact with their nonresidential fathers during childhood and adolescence so that they might have relationships with them now (Baker, 2005, 2007; Clawar & Rivlin, 1991).

Emerging adulthood. Emerging adults are particularly interesting because they are experiencing the transition between court-mediated contact with their nonresidential fathers and self-directed contacts. In general, emerging adults desire greater contact with nonresidential fathers (Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Finley & Schwartz, 2007), want to have more conversations with them (Nielsen, 2007), and wish for greater flexibility in when they get to see them than they had when they were children (Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Finley & Schwartz, 2007; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). However, these desires are often offset by the actions and opinions of the residential mother. Residential mothers' power rarely fully dissipates after children leave home (Fabricius, 2003). For example, mothers seldom treat their emerging adult children as equals. Adjusting the parent-child relationship from one of parent superiority and influence to one where mothers respect the child's independence is a slow and gradual process (Arnett, 2004, p 47; Fingerman, 2000). Most college students (70-80%) whose parents divorced were aware that fathers wanted more time with them, but they also knew their

mothers opposed it so they were cautious about fostering more contact (Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius & Hall, 2000).

Eldar-Avidan and colleagues (2009) found three types of emerging adult-parent relationships in Israel (i.e., resilient, survivor, vulnerable). Elder-Avidan's work suggests that emerging adults who maintain contact with nonresidential fathers post-divorce have higher quality relationships and feel more supported overall. Those in resilient relationships felt the divorce experience was a meaningful and empowering transition; this group felt close to both residential and nonresidential parents and their nonresidential fathers had been consistently involved with them. Survivors felt the divorce was a complex event and felt closer to their resident mothers than their nonresidential fathers. These emerging adults experienced a decline in contact with their nonresidential fathers following the divorce. Vulnerable emerging adults felt the divorce was a painful event that projected negatively on the rest of their lives, and they lacked connection or contact with residential and nonresidential parents. This study provided valuable insight into some of the variability in emerging adult child-parent post-divorce relationships, but it did not explain the processes involved.

There is some research that explains how emerging adults adjust their relationships with nonresidential fathers after they turn 18. Though a minority of nonresidential fathers are completely absent from their children's lives, reunification with a formerly absent nonresidential father sometimes occurs when children become emerging adults (Darnall & Steinberg; 2008a, 2008b). Fidler and Bala (2010) found that reunification was sometimes motivated by crises causing emerging adults to need both parents (e.g., being criminally charged, a terminal illness of a close family member, or

needing money). These reunifications occurred more often when: (a) the residential mother supported the reconnection, (b) the court became involved, or (c) siblings who had continued to have contact with the absent parent influenced the emerging adult.

Although there has been research on emerging adults' reflections on divorce (Konstam, 2009), current relationship with parents post-divorce (Elder-Avidan et al., 2009; Shulman, Cohen, Feldman, Mahler, 2006), and the processes behind reunification with formerly absent fathers (Fidler & Bala, 2010), we do not fully understand how the relationships between emerging adults and their nonresidential fathers change or are maintained during the transition to adulthood. It is important to understand this because supportive contact from fathers is highly protective in light of the stressors associated with this developmental period (Fabricius, 2003). For example, supportive contact predicts emerging adult success in college, both in terms of affording tuition (Fabricius, Braver, & Deneau, 2003) and timely completion of a college degree (Chadwick, 2002; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Menning, 2006), and also predicts greater emotional health (Amato & Dorius, 2010; Mitchell, Booth, & King, 2009; Carlson, 2006; King & Sobolewski, 2006; Stewart, 2003).

Study Purpose

Divorce researchers have found that supportive contact is central to positive relationships between emerging adults and their parents and that this support protects them from stressors that can negatively impact their wellbeing (Ahrons, 2007; Leite & McKenry, 2002; Nielsen, 2007). A positive relationship between emerging adults and nonresidential fathers is particularly helpful in lowering depressive symptoms and increasing retention rates of emerging adults enrolled in college (Amato & Dorius, 2010;

Fabricius et al., 2010; Nielsen, 2011). Considerable research indicates, however, that nonresidential father-child relationships are vulnerable following divorce because fathers' access to children may be limited by custody arrangements (Kelly, 2012), mothers' restrictive gatekeeping (Ganong et al., 2012), or institutions that privilege residential parents (e.g., teachers, doctors; Fagan & Hawkins, 2003; Frieman, 2007; Sieber, 2008). There is limited research about how emerging adults' relationships with their nonresidential fathers change or why they remain stable over time. Thus, the present study focused specifically on the relationships between emerging adults and their nonresidential fathers. I used grounded theory methods to answer the central question: How are relationships between emerging adults and their nonresidential fathers maintained or changed over time?

Chapter 3: Methods

Methodological Approach

Grounded theory method is a systematic qualitative investigation that focuses on the processes related to a social phenomenon. This set of methods is particularly appropriate when previous research is insufficient for making a priori hypotheses about how or why a phenomenon occurs. In this case, there is very limited information about the perspectives of emerging adults on post-divorce family life. The information that does exist often includes a much wider range of ages, and therefore, may obscure some of the distinct processes that accompany relationship maintenance during emerging adulthood.

Grounded theory methods were appropriate for this study because I was interested in understanding the intra- and interpersonal *processes* that help emerging adults maintain positive relationships with their fathers following divorce. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define process as the interactions and emotions that occur in response to the phenomenon of interest. In-depth analysis of interview data allows the researcher to draw a set of conclusions not only about what is happening in the lived experiences of participants, but also why or through what mechanisms they are experiencing a social phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Although considerable research has focused on the outcomes and experiences of children whose parents divorce, rarely have scholars looked to the children themselves to explain their role in shaping post-divorce family life. Grounded theory methods derive originally from symbolic interaction theory which suggests that social processes are constructed as individuals interact with each other and with the social environment (LaRossa, 2005). Symbolic interaction theory stipulates that when we interact with others

we develop meaning based on our subjective interpretation of objects, events, and behaviors during those interactions. A richer understanding of this meaning is necessary in order to understand how individuals see their world and share meaning others in similar circumstances. This suggests that children are active agents in creating and maintaining family life. In this study, my aim was to explore how emerging adults, having gained insight from age and distance from the family, understood their relationships with nonresidential fathers.

Participants

Most of the participants in the study were recruited and interviewed in 2009; however, additional data were needed for this analysis so four new participants were interviewed in 2013. The same recruitment techniques and general procedures were used for both data collections.

Recruitment. All study participants were recruited from a large Midwestern University through email advertisements, listserves, large lecture hall advertisements, and word of mouth. Those who responded to advertisements completed a screening interview via e-mail (see Appendix A), which was used to establish eligibility for the study. Along with basic demographic information, the screening form included questions about how much of the time they lived with each parent (i.e., < 25%, 50%, 75%, or nearly 100%) and the quality of their relationships with each parent (i.e., excellent, good, fair, or poor).

Theoretical sampling. The initial sample for this study was drawn from a broader investigation of nonresidential parent-child relationships that was conducted in 2009. Eligibility requirements for that study were less strict than for the current investigation. The sample included any young adult whose parents divorced before they

were 18 and said they spent 50% (or less) of their time living with one of their parents during childhood. The participants that were interviewed in 2009 were included in the present investigation only if they were emerging adults (i.e., unmarried and 18 to 25 years old at the time of interview) and had a nonresidential father during childhood. Three young adults from the original sample did not meet these criteria; one was under 18 and two had nonresidential mothers. Thus, the sample for the present study started with 29 emerging adults (8 men; 21 women).

In grounded theory, sampling is an ongoing process that is adjusted throughout the study to yield the richest possible data. This process, called *theoretical sampling,* is used to selectively recruit participants who can speak to particular experiences or offer new insights about the phenomenon of interest (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As analysis progressed in the present study, questions developed that could not be answered with the available data. Thus, additional emerging adults were recruited to participate in 2013. Along with the original criteria for the study, I sought out new participants who could offer insight about emerging themes within the data. Specifically, based on the analysis of existing data, I began to form a typology of nonresidential father-child relationships, with some participants having consistently close relationships, others disengaging from their fathers, and still others engaging in a process of reframing their relationships during the transition to adulthood. In order to check this typology with new participants and gain additional understanding of the underlying mechanisms that may lead to different types relationships.

Like the original participants, potential interviewees filled out screening forms indicating the time spent with their fathers and the quality of their relationships. Based on

their responses, I chose individuals who I thought would be consistently close (i.e., saw their fathers often during childhood and reported a good relationship now), disengaged (i.e., saw their fathers infrequently during childhood and reported a poor relationship now) or improved (i.e., saw their fathers infrequently during childhood and reported a good relationship now). In the process of conducting new interviews, I began to realize that rigid categories did not adequately reflect the complex processes that shaped nonresidential father-child relationships during the transition to adulthood. Through theoretical sampling and additional analysis, I was able to revise the emerging theory and explore new avenues for organizing the explaining the data.

Sample Description. The final sample consisted of 33 emerging adults including 9 men and 24 women. They ranged in age from 18 to 23 (mean = 20.15) and nearly everyone in the sample (n =31) identified themselves as White and middle class. About 40% (n = 13) had two parents who had remarried, whereas 15% (n = 5) only had a remarried father and 15% only had a remarried mother (n = 5); for the remaining 30% (n = 10) neither parent had remarried. Most participants lived at least 75% of the time with their mothers; only six reported seeing their fathers more than 25% of the time post-divorce. See Table 1 for a detailed description of each participant.

Data Collection

After consenting to the interview (Appendix B), emerging adults were interviewed for approximately 60-90 minutes in a university office. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. A $10 gift card was provided for participating in the study.

Procedure. In-depth interviews were conducted in order to understand how individuals maintained contact with their nonresidential fathers after their parents divorced and to explore what factors facilitated emerging adults in maintaining or changing their relationship with their father. Interviews began with a genogram that identified all members of the emerging adult's family including parents, parents' present and past partners, siblings, stepsiblings, and anyone else they believed should be included as part of the family. The genogram also indicated when parents divorced and remarried, if they had done so.

A general interview protocol was followed (see Appendix A), however, questions were open-ended and the participants were prompted to expand on topics of particular interest to the research team. This flexible interviewing technique is commonly used in grounded theory methods to elicit rich responses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Interviewers progressed chronologically, beginning with the parents' divorce and asking about nonresidential father-child contact over time. Participants were also asked questions about relationships with other family members (e.g., mothers) to better understand the context of the nonresidential father-child relationship. After conducting several interviews, the research team discussed which emerging adults should be re-interviewed to clarify their responses or expand on emerging themes. This resulted in follow-up interviews with eight participants.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory uses an inductive approach in which meanings and understandings come directly from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The central analytical tools of grounded theory analysis are constant comparison techniques, which

require the researcher to take codes and concepts derived from the data and compare them to previously developed interviews, codes, and ideas. By always comparing new data to the previously analyzed data and codes, themes emerge that might have otherwise been missed. Additionally, using constant comparison techniques allows for analysis to develop beyond a description of the phenomenon to build a deeper theoretical explanation for the phenomenon of interest (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Theoretical sensitivity. In order to effectively use constant comparison techniques, the researcher must recognize his or her exposure to various topics based on their experiences and the literatures they have read (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Although other qualitative researchers have written about avoiding bias by 'bracketing' their experiences, Corbin and Strauss (2008) rejected the possibility of eliminating all personal bias. Rather, they recommended that researchers acknowledge their biases and use team settings and systematic techniques to limit them. Prior to data analysis, I evaluated the biases that may have resulted from spending several years as part of a research team studying post-divorce families. In particular, I am influenced by the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective, which emphasizes resilience in post-divorce families. Early data analysis was strongly influenced by this bias, as I focused solely on emerging adults whose relationships with fathers had worsened and eventually improved. After consultation with the research team (Drs. Coleman and Jamison), I began to also explore those in the sample whose relationships never changed (i.e., stayed positive or negative). This reassessment provided a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon for the whole sample, rather than one particular subgroup. In other words,

both those whose relationships with fathers changed and those whose were maintained were represented in the final analysis.

Coding. Coding is a method for breaking down raw interview data for analysis. The first step in the coding process is open coding, which involves analyzing every line of text in order to identify important concepts in the data using the exact words of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I used open coding to yield a set of categories that represented how emerging adults defined and explained their relationships with their nonresidential fathers. Some of the categories became the basis for the final results and theoretical propositions, while others were trimmed for the sake of parsimony or subsumed under broader themes.

After breaking down the data during open coding, the next stage of data analysis is to look for relationships among codes; in other words, the researcher reconstructs the data in a meaningful and logical way. During this phase of analysis, I created detailed tables (see Appendix C) that helped me to organize the categories developed during open coding, participant quotes, and broader themes. These tables were used as an analytical and organizational tool, which helped me to identify patterns and groupings of participants. This process initially led to the creation of a typology of father-child relationships. However, continued analysis and the collection of new data resulted in a more general explanation of the processes accompanying relationship maintenance between emerging adults and their fathers.

Throughout the coding process, I wrote extensive theoretical memos (i.e., creating a written record of analysis; Corbin & Strauss, p. 117) in order to formulate and refine broader themes and theoretical insights. Over the year I spent analyzing these data, I

created hundreds of memos (see Appendix D for examples) that addressed my reading and coding of each interview. Early memos focused on understanding the story of each participant and possible future directions for coding. Later memos focused on how the categories that were derived from open coding related to each other and raised questions I had about the data. As data analysis progressed, the memos provided a means to work through patterns within the data and develop explanations for relationship processes that emerged. All memos and codes were shared during weekly face-to-face meetings with Dr. Coleman in order to triangulate the data, confirm the validity of the conclusions that I developed, and improve the rigor of the analysis.

The final stage of data analysis, theory elaboration, was completed through the process of writing the results. Data elaboration involves systematically working through the emerging findings in order to identify gaps, inconsistencies, or redundancy (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I went through numerous iterations of the results, refining and changing ideas as needed in order to produce a cogent and parsimonious narrative about nonresidential father-child relationships. When I found problems or inconsistencies in what I was writing, I returned to the raw data, memos, and analytical tables to adjust and reorganize the ideas. This systematic process was used to create a rigorous, detailed understanding of the mechanisms that influence emerging adult-father relationships post-divorce.

Chapter 4: Results

All emerging adults in the sample reported that their living arrangements and the time spent with their fathers changed after their parents divorced. For some (n =10), these changes did not alter their relationships with their fathers, but most (n=23) believed that their relationships were altered through a series of changes over time. Specifically, father-child relationships tended to worsen immediately after the divorce but eventually improved (e.g., greater support, less contentious interactions with fathers). How these changes unfolded depended on (a) parent-child interactions post-divorce, and (b) emerging adults' reflections on what their roles should be in the family as they became adults.

Consistent Relationships

Of the ten who reported that their relationships with their fathers had not changed since the divorce, eight indicated that their relationships had always been positive. Rebecca stated, "The divorce hasn't made me and my mom closer, or me and my dad closer. Things have changed, but for the most part our relationship hasn't changed." She explained that the divorce experience, "Didn't really affect me that much. I wasn't sad, crying, depressed and all of that." Yvonne thought that she might be an exception, not believing that others would have such positive relationships with parents who are no longer married to each other, "I've always had a good relationship with [dad] (…) We just get along really well. (…) It's really weird, I know most people wouldn't be like that. But, I felt that [our relationship] was the same [post-divorce]." Her experiences, however, were not as unique as she thought. In this sample, approximately one quarter of emerging adults reported always having good relationships with their fathers.

Consistently positive relationships seemed to emerge when participants had (a) close proximity to fathers and open access to his home, (b) fathers who continuously engaged in their lives, and (c) a lack of enmity between parents. Having parents' houses only a few minutes apart allowed for frequent contact between fathers and their nonresidential children. Several (n=4) felt they could see their fathers whenever they wished, and all commented that they enjoyed spending time at their fathers' homes. In consistently positive relationships, fathers also made efforts to remain in frequent contact; they called their children often and took advantage of available visitation. Although in-person contact ranged from occasional visits to weekly overnight visits, a common theme among this group was the belief that their fathers cared about them and that they could trust their fathers to be around in the future, even though they were no longer married to their mothers.

Those who always had good relationships with their fathers said that their parents rarely, if ever, fought in front of them or criticized each other, "[Mom] didn't bash [dad], and he didn't bash her. [They] just went their separate ways" (Rebecca). The individuals in this group also perceived their parents to be working together as coparents:

> They didn't talk about each other negatively to us, and they communicated with each other about what was going on with us. If I did something wrong, like if I got in trouble at my mom's, she would call my dad and tell him "Hey, this is what happened. I want you to know and tell me what you think we should do." It was always 'we.' If I got in trouble one place, I was in trouble at the other place, too. (Kristen)

When parents made decisions across households and kept children out of conflict, emerging adults reported that the divorce experience was not traumatic and that their relationships with both parents were positive.

Two individuals reported that their relationships with their fathers had never been good. Both had family histories involving substance abuse before the divorce. Veronica's emotions toward her father were strongly negative, "I hated him, he never understood [me], never was there for me, (…) We never connected on a basic level. And I was just sad a lot and angry. (…) I'm just really angry all the time with him." David's emotional connection with his father was weak rather than strongly negative, "We don't really talk about a lot of personal things. We only go so deep when we talk about stuff, and so [our relationship] hasn't really changed a lot." David also reported that he had not seen his father in years, despite having opportunities to do so. "It just seems like whenever I am gonna take a trip [to dad's house], I always end up going somewhere with my friends." Both David and Veronica reported long gaps in contact with their fathers. They indicated that when their fathers were in their lives, the experience was often stressful. Veronica also reported feeling stressed by her parents' interactions before the divorce. She mentioned that they had "always been very volatile" and remembered how they would "blow up" and be "angry with each other." When asked to elaborate she described an incident that occurred a year prior to the legal divorce:

> One time when I was 16, [my parents] were in a fight. Mom had plans with her friends for the week. She used to drive this Chrysler and [Dad] drove this Tahoe. She was going to take the [Tahoe], and he got mad and chased us around in the Chrysler. Because I was going to babysit for this other woman, we parked in the

> driveway of my mom's friend's house. He drove up and hit the [Tahoe] with the Chrysler and came up and started yelling at my mom through the driver's side window, telling her that she was evil and she couldn't take the truck. So she backed out and left, and we went back home. He came back and he blocked her in the driveway with the Chrysler and he tried to pull my mom through the window of the truck. I told him "I'm leaving." So I got in the Chrysler and I backed out, and he ran down the driveway and he opened the door and he said you're not leaving. And he jumped on top of me and punched me in the face and then tried to turn the car off.

Although they were uncommon, hostile or violent interactions left an indelible impact on the father-child relationship. However, in spite of their negative comments, both David and Veronica were open to future improvements in their relationships with their fathers. Neither saw this as likely to happen soon, but David said, "It could get better in the future (…) I'm busy with my school stuff right now. [My dad and I have] both kind of accepted where [the relationship] is right now." Veronica mused, "He's my dad. And I hope one day that we could have a relationship, I know that today is not that day, but maybe one day."

Changed Relationships

Twenty-three emerging adults indicated that their relationships with their fathers had changed since their parents divorced. In most cases, relationships worsened immediately following the divorce. Participants described this as "getting distant" (Gwenn), "not talking" (Cynthia, Natalie, and Abby), or "periods of no contact" (Marie). The processes involved in these worsening relationships varied, but the most prominent

themes that emerged included (a) feelings of loss, (b) awkwardness and discomfort when around fathers or their fathers' new partners, and (c) ongoing conflict between their parents, including a sense that their mothers had tarnished their fathers' image.

Sense of loss. All twenty-three participants whose relationships with fathers changed reported feelings of loss from spending less time with their fathers. Liam said, "[Dad moving out] looks like "I'm leaving you, I'm abandoning you." Natalie felt this loss more acutely when she was around other families:

> I was happy until something as silly as seeing a dad and his daughter playing catch. [The divorce] didn't bother me until I was reminded that he wasn't there. My mom was always there for everything. So it wasn't until you actually saw a father and a daughter doing something that it bothered me.

Most fathers lived close by, but for those farther away distance reinforced the sense of loss:

> My dad moved to Chicago when I was in 6th grade. That was hard. I think my brother and I felt a little bit abandoned. I was just frustrated with my dad that he wasn't around when I wanted him to be. (Amy)

Feelings of discomfort. Although they missed their fathers, emerging adults reported that visits with them were often unpleasant or awkward in the beginning. They felt that their fathers' new homes were not very inviting due to a lack of sufficient space or comfortable accommodations for them. Liam said, "We had to sleep on blow up mattresses." Natalie questioned the appropriateness of her father's home, "It wasn't a kid friendly house. They had fancy furniture that you couldn't sit on and fancy bedspreads. No toys or anything." Valarie also had negative memories of her father's new residence:

> I wish I had had my own [room]. It was annoying packing to go to my dad's every weekend. It just signaled that [my parents] were separated. I had to bring all my stuff with me [to his house] (…) I definitely called my mom's house 'home', and I called my dad's house 'my dad's house.'

Overall, most considered their mothers' households as home; their fathers' homes were places they visited. Abby stopped visiting her dad as a teenager "I lived with my mom, all my stuff was there, she took care of us." Zack summed up his preference for his mother's house as a matter of comfort,

> My mom's house, I liked being there more. It wasn't because of my dad, it wasn't because of my mom, and it wasn't because of [stepmom]. It's just because I had all the things I consider mine, this is my space, it was my home.

Fathers' new partners also created discomfort for some emerging adults (n = 13). Julia was annoyed that she had to interact with a new girlfriend each time she visited her father:

> [Dad's girlfriends were] weird and annoying, especially when I was younger. I'd go over there, and I'd be used to one girl for a weekend, and then the next weekend it was somebody different.

Fiona remembered not wanting to share her father with his girlfriend, "He's ours. Back off!" Abby reported:

> [During childhood] I just felt he was selfish and always worrying about girls and not his kids, so I didn't talk to him that much. Over the years I grew apart from him, and I didn't realize it until I look back now.

These tensions continued when fathers remarried. Opinions of stepmothers ranged from being "apprehensive" (Amy) to thinking that they "didn't want me [at their house]" (Jen). Stepmothers were not always viewed negatively, but they were commonly reported as contributing to feelings if discomfort around their fathers, especially in the years immediately following the divorce.

Parental conflict. Ongoing parental conflict, especially parents "bad mouthing" each other (Zack), having "big blow outs" (Lucy), and "yelling and hanging up on each other" (Julia) made their interactions with both parents unpleasant. Just under half of participants in this group (n = 10) mentioned contentious relationships between parents as a contributing factor to problems with their dads. Dianne remembered being confused and saddened by these conflicts:

> [After the divorce] was awful. I think that as a young child you don't know what to do. You have Dad telling you something about Mom. Mom's telling you something about Dad. Grandma's telling you something about Dad. Who do I believe? When should I believe it? I'm here with this [parent] and so I don't want to think poorly of them, and then with [the other parent] you don't want to think poorly of them. So I felt really torn the whole time and it made me sad. I remember crying a lot about it because I didn't know what to do.

Being put in the middle of parental conflicts was particularly problematic for the father-child relationship. Participants reported that they "had to be the communicators" (Gloria) and the one "mediating between mom and my dad" (Gwenn)**.** They described it as "annoying" (Julia) and "hated it" when it happened (Robert). Gwenn concluded, "I

think they could definitely do a better job with keeping their fights to themselves and not lash them out onto the kids. They could always have done a better job with that."

Reflecting on their childhood experiences, several emerging adults felt that their mothers had undermined their relationships with their fathers. Dianne explained:

> [My relationship with my dad] was tested because when I lived at home with just my mother, especially right after she left my dad, there was a time that brainwashing [was] occurring. I lived with my grandmother too, and she didn't like my dad until the day she died. So there was a lot of things being put in my head that weren't necessarily true.

For three women in this group, their mothers labeled their fathers as alcoholics. Being kept away from their fathers was presented as a matter of safety, and it was not until they were older that their mothers allowed them to visit their fathers. Although Abby did not think her mom actively restricted her relationship with her father, she recognized that she did not facilitate it either:

> I don't think she helped [my relationship with my dad]. Maybe she hindered it in a way. [Mom] would be like 'Oh my god, your dad' and say stuff like that. Or, when I would vent to her about what happened over the weekend [at dad's], she'd be like 'That's ridiculous.' She never really stuck up for him.

Feelings of loss and discomfort often lasted for years during childhood. Fathers' remarriages and parents continued conflict exacerbated the distance between nonresidential fathers and their children. Only when participants reached late adolescence or left the home for college did the relationship change again, offering new opportunities for connection.

Improved relationships. Nearly all participants (n = 21) perceived that their relationships with their fathers had improved in the few years prior to the interview. Although these relationships did not necessarily become *closer*, communication increased and stressful interactions with fathers decreased, especially when compared to childhood. Sometimes emerging adults reported that their fathers had changed; specifically, he talked to them more frequently (often on the phone; n = 10), provided more financial assistance (n=9), and/or started treating them as adults (e.g., backing their school/career decisions; n=10). However, they also reported changes in themselves that they felt helped to improve their relationships. In particular, they (a) perceived changes in their own maturity (n=4), (b) lowered their expectations of fathers (n=12), (c) took more responsibility for the relationship (e.g., developing a sense of obligation; n = 7), and (d) actively controlled interactions with parents (e.g., refusing to mediate conversations between parents; n=10). Changes in fathers were viewed as having a positive influence on the relationship, but the changes they recognized in themselves were equally important. As they transitioned to adulthood, participants made changes within themselves to cope with the stress associated with interacting with their fathers.

Changes in fathers. Fathers were often credited for initiating greater communication, but the topics they discussed and the processes used to reestablish communication varied from participant to participant. Abby’s parents divorced when she was 2 years old and contact with her father lessened during middle school and high school. Once she entered college, however, her father started calling her more often and inviting her to dinner:

> It's mainly [dad] that makes more of an effort than I do because he invites me, and so I go. (…) I'd say he puts in more of the effort all around. That's why we're still in contact, probably because of him mostly rather than me. (Abby)

Cynthia was 12 when her parents divorced, and she reported little contact with her father in the years immediately following. Her father, like Abby's, also had started calling more often in the last couple of years. His increased communication started with an apology for how hard the divorce had been for the family, "[My parents] did a lot of things that were wrong, and [dad] is the only one that apologized [for those wrongs]." Cynthia said that since that apology, her father had continued to call and reiterate to her how much he cared about her, "[Dad] left a message on my phone saying that if I ever need to talk or anything [he'll] be there. And [wanted me] to know that no matter what, he always loved me, and he'll always be proud." Gloria's father also started calling more often with messages concerning how much he cared about her:

> I have a lot of missed calls from [dad] and messages, and a lot of 'I love you's', which [my siblings and I] did not hear that often from him. That's a new thing, he's definitely trying harder. (…) He's definitely trying harder during [birthdays and Christmas]. I can tell that he's trying to be a dad. (Gloria)

The increased frequency of phone calls often occurred during the transition from high school to college. These calls were used as an opportunity for fathers to learn about their maturing children. Susan felt her father "got to know [her] more" during this time and perceived that he now "realized who [she] was, which he probably didn't know before." Dianne reported how simple conversations with her father about daily life during her freshman year at college were a time of reconnection, "Our conversations

[freshman year] would be for an hour sometimes, just telling [dad] everything I did that day. So I'd consider that a turning point because that was definitely a reconnection time. I needed that support."

Along with several others, Dianne also appreciated her father's newfound financial support during this time. She reported that her father had never paid the full amount of his child support when she was a child, but he was now helping "pay for half of my housing," as well as providing additional money she could use to have a social life. Cynthia similarly reported that, unlike during her childhood, her father was now financially available. "Lately when I need something, I can call him." Marie believed that her father's recent financial support was intended to help rebuild their relationship:

> It seems like he's trying to reach out and build a relationship. [Dad] said, 'I couldn't be there for you when you were little, but I'll financially support you now.' If I call him and say I need money; it's no questions asked. It's given to me. [He gives] little extras all the time, and he's giving me his car now. He was never like that when I was little. He was thousands upon thousands of dollars behind in child support for a while (…) [Now] he's offering [to pay for] next semester's [tuition].

Amy was one of the exceptions who reported having a father who was consistently financially supportive:

> My dad is a huge financial support for my family. My dad's the vice president of a company, he totally supports my brother and I financially. He pays for my college and my rent and all of that. So I talk to him a lot about that.

Consistent financial support had been rare, so many emerging adults viewed their fathers' financial contributions as a positive change from what they experienced during childhood.

Although subtler than the other changes, participants frequently mentioned that they felt their fathers treated them more like adults. For example, Marie felt that her father now saw her as more of a peer than as a child:

> When I was little he couldn't talk about going to parties with me, and he couldn't [talk] about drinking with me, and now he can. (…) We're a lot closer now than we used to be because it seems like we're the same age now

Zack also perceived that his father treated him differently, "[Starting] a few years ago he would ask 'Hey, you want to meet me at [an area of town] to get lunch. That's new." When probed what these invitations meant to him, Zack said:

> I think that [dad] is beginning to consider me as an adult. I think he is starting to get the idea that I'm getting older. I like that. It's a good thing. [He is] treating me in a way that I want to be treated. [Dad] is starting to recognize that you don't want to be 22 or 23 and your dad to be coming down on you for something. I think that is for the best, let me do my thing.

Abby preferred this supportive, but autonomous relationship as well:

> [My dad is] more [a] friend than a parent, I say that because my mom is always lecturing me and telling me what to do, which is normal. [Dad] doesn't really tell me what to do. So, we would be more of like friend-acquaintances, because he doesn't [say] 'You need to this, you need to that', he is just there. It's nice that he

> doesn't tell me what to do. [It's been like that since] I graduated high school and came into college.

Along with being treated as an adult was the feeling that their fathers supported their decisions about school and career. Emerging adults appreciated their fathers "backing them up." Cynthia described how her father respected her college plans, "He's been the only one that supported my decision to go to school (…) He didn't try to pull me whichever way." Similarly, Sylvester appreciated that his dad supported his choice of college:

> [Applying to college] helped me get closer to my dad. Mom and I had a few arguments about going to college (…) [The larger State school] was the place that I wanted to come most, that was something that I had [in common] with my dad.

Others reported how their fathers backed up their important academic choices once they were already in college. Penny provided a story about switching majors:

I want to [be a teacher] and [dad] was one of the ones who backed me up. (…) I was an engineering student for my first year here and then I switched to education, and I was like '[Dad], you were the only one who was behind me in switching [majors].'

Emerging adults saw the relaxing of parental control as a positive change in their relationships with their fathers. It gave them a foundation for a new type of relationship either as friends, peers, or simply parent and adult child.

Changes in participants. Perceiving changes in their fathers helped many participants feel that they had better relationships now compared to childhood. However, every participant in this group believed that they also had changed in ways that made their relationships with their fathers less contentious, or at least possible, since getting

older. Personal maturity was credited as a reason for some relationships improving, even when fathers were not behaving any differently than they had during childhood. When asked about her improved relationship with her father Abby said, “Time, maturity, getting over myself.” Unlike those who felt their fathers had changed, she said it was: More me changing. I feel [dad] was more constant, he’s been pretty consistent on how he’s trying to contact me, I think it was just my perspective changing that had more to do with it that what he actually did.

When asked what she meant by her perspective changing, she said, “I grew up and realized it’s not all about me. (…) I don’t really see [the divorce] as the big deal now that it used to be [to me].” Reframing the divorce as ‘no big deal’ allowed her to also change how she thought about her father:

> I feel real bad [about my previously distant relationship with dad] because he’s my dad, and it’s not like he never did anything for me. I wouldn’t say he did as much as my mom did, but it’s not like he didn’t care about me.

Gwenn reported that she believed her dad had always acted in the same manner towards her too, but she did not see it positively until recently, “I think [our relationship] has gotten better as time goes on. The thing about my dad is that he’s treated me the same [during] my childhood and growing up. He’s treated me more like a friend than a daughter.” When asked why recently being a friend was better than when she was younger she replied:

> When I was younger I had an okay relationship with [my father]. He was just my dad, but I thought he was kind of weird. [Our relationship] has gotten better

> because [now] I understand where he's coming from more. I appreciate his friendship more than I did when I was younger.

Luis was similar, concluding that his maturity allowed him to "just appreciate more what [dad] did. Just recognize[ing] what he had been doing, [he] had the best intentions."

For many, improved relationships were less about recognizing the good in their fathers and more about ignoring the bad. Even with time and greater maturity, only seven emerging adults with improved relationships reported that their current relationships were excellent. Nearly half of those reporting improved relationships attributed the positive changes to lowering their expectations of their fathers. Hilary, for example, was still disappointed that her father was unreliable, but "learned not to expect things of him" and when asked about her current relationship with her father she referred to it as "better" and "good." Those who lowered their expectations recognized it was "pointless" to wait for fathers to change (Marie) and learned to "put up" with the things they did not like about their fathers (Lucy). They "accepted that's how he was going to be" (Abby, Susan).

Higher expectations of their fathers during childhood resulted in tension, stress, and eventually distance. Although relationships with fathers did not necessarily become closer during emerging adulthood, lowered expectations eliminated some of the frustration and allowed for less stressful relationships. Zack, for example, recognized he would not get to see his dad much because of his dad's job so he focused on the positive, "I don't regret anything, I don't feel there needs to be any more closeness between us" and mentioned how he enjoys the limited time he has with his father, "I don't see him as often. When I get the chance to [see him] I get excited, and I don't give myself a choice not to [see him]."

Rather than focusing on the good in their fathers or lowering their expectations in order to avoid the bad, some described how they had changed their expectations of themselves. These seven emerging adults decided to take on the responsibility for continuing relationships with their fathers out of a sense of obligation. Despite previously distant relationships with fathers, they decided that they should maintain some relationship with him because they wanted a father in their lives. No one in this situation particularly wanted to visit their fathers, but they felt they should, “Regardless of what he’s done, he’s still my dad. That’s what it comes down to.” (Susan), “Throughout my entire life I didn’t like hanging out with him, [but] I’m his son. He’s my dad, and as much as I sometimes resent him, I still need to [visit him], he’s my father.” (Thomas). Abby said, “As I got older, I realized that family is important to me, and so I’m trying to fit my dad somewhere (…) He is my dad. I feel with family it’s implied that you’re supposed to have contact with your mom and dad.” Abby also talked about the responsibility she felt for the relationship, “I feel obligated [to contact him] just because he is my dad. [I'm obligated to] be in contact with him, not cut him out, have somewhat of a relationship.”

Many emerging adults began to actively control their interactions with fathers in order to eliminate conflict associated with increased contact. This was particularly true for those who had spent their childhoods stuck in the middle of coparental conflict or in situations where parents spoke negatively about each other. In order to promote more neutral conversations, participants actively avoided contentious topics when talking with their fathers, “[My father and I] know when to stop talking. If something’s going on that’s frustrating on either end, I think we both know when to talk and when to just keep our mouth shut.” (Gloria), “[Our conflict] is just hidden better than it used to be. Since I

don't have to deal with the bad side effects directly anymore I don't care as much about it either," (Marie). Several participants (n = 7) controlled the interactions with their father by directly telling them what they needed in order for them to remain in contact. Cynthia told her father, "If he wasn't going to stay stable in [her] life to stay out of it." Others addressed both parents about their preferred role in coparental conflict or communication. For example, 'It's not my problem. I'm not supposed to communicate for you guys.'" (Julia), "We're not playing this game, you guys have to be adults and deal with this yourself" (Robert), "You guys can figure that out. Don't ask me about it," (Lucy). Penny took control over who initiated conversations between her and her father, "I'll usually call him on my way home from work. I know that it's 15 minutes that I've got free, so I'll give him a call then." Dianne also regulated when it was an appropriate time to talk to her father, "I told [dad] 'Telling me that I'm not calling you makes me not want to call you.'" She would punish her father for complaining about her rules for contacting her by not calling him for a period of time. She would only start talking to him again when she felt he understood that she decides when conversations should take place.

Conclusions

Although after divorce those in the study had to adjust to living separately from their fathers and seeing them less often, this was far more stressful for some than others. A minority (n = 8) were never particularly stressed and felt they retained their connection to their fathers despite not living with them. They saw their fathers regularly and felt close to them throughout childhood and into emerging adulthood. However, most participants reported that divorce strained relationships with their fathers (n = 23), and

created emotional distance which they attributed to a variety of divorce-related stressors (e.g., coparental conflict).

Emerging adulthood provided these individuals with opportunities to change their relationships with their fathers, either by finding ways to bridge the gap they felt between them. Two solidified their decision to remain distant. The majority reworked their relationships with their fathers by thinking about themselves or their fathers differently.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Arnett (2004) suggests that emerging adulthood presents an opportunity to renegotiate parent-child relationships. During their late teens and early twenties, many children move out of their parent's home, seek higher education, and take steps toward financial independence. Thus, they must balance their need for support with their growing independence as new boundaries are established within the parent-child relationship (Arnett, 2007; Tanner & Arnett, 2009). For those with divorced parents, this transition may be particularly important for rebuilding or repairing relationships that were strained following the divorce. My findings suggest that normative changes that accompany emerging adulthood (e.g., leaving their mother's home, gaining new insight about themselves and their families) may enable the renewal of connections between previously distant nonresidential fathers and children. Emerging adults whose relationships with their fathers improved over time were grateful to have their fathers in their lives even though most recognized limitations to their relationships. My findings provide preliminary evidence that relationships can and do change as children become adults. Based on the findings from this study, I suggest several mechanisms by which relationships change and make recommendations about future research and practice related to post-divorce family life.

Theoretical Insights About Post-divorce Parent-child Relationships

One of the primary goals of grounded theory is to explain the processes or mechanisms that underlie social phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). There is an extensive literature that examines relationship processes in families after divorce, often with a focus on understanding why some families or family members are resilient to

divorce-related stress and others suffer poor outcomes (Amato, 2000; 2010; Kelly, 2012). My findings suggest that there are latent opportunities for resilience that emerge as children transition to adulthood. Some children show signs of resilience almost immediately following divorce (Ahrons, 2007), but for those who continue to struggle with post-divorce family relationships, my findings indicate that continued investments by fathers may yield positive outcomes much later in the life of the child. The following theoretical propositions add nuance to the divorce-stress-adaptation perspective by revealing how stress and development play a role in the longitudinal course of divorce more generally and the long-term nature of resilience processes in particular.

In this study, I identified a set of relational changes that are common among emerging adults and their fathers following divorce. I offer three propositions about the mechanisms responsible for perceived changes (or lack thereof) in the post-divorce father-child relationship: (a) when families adhere to suggestions derived from previous clinical and empirical research (e.g., fathers should maintain a positive presence in their children's lives post-divorce, parents should be respectful towards each other), father-child relationships can remain positive throughout the divorce process, (b) the stressors associated with post-divorce family life (e.g., establishing new households, finding new partners) shape father-child relationships in lasting and important ways, and (c) developmental changes associated with emerging adulthood (e.g., greater reasoning, emotional intelligence, and self-understanding) provide opportunities to reconnect with their fathers by reassessing his behaviors and their own.

Proposition 1: Understanding positive father-child relationships

Although most children feel distant from their fathers immediately following divorce, some do not. These individuals' experiences are important because they support a well-developed literature on the circumstances that lead to healthy post-divorce parent-child relationships. When fathers remain involved (Kelly, 2012), provide financial support (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004), and maintain cooperative relationships with mothers post-divorce (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011; Feinberg, 2002; 2003; Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007), their relationships with their children tend to remain strong. These findings further validate the need for programming aimed at shaping the processes and behaviors parents engage in post-divorce (Schramm & Calix, 2011). By the time they reach emerging adulthood, children whose parents were amicable report that the divorce had little impact on their relationships with their parents or their lives more generally. Promoting cooperation between parents and encouraging nonresidential fathers to remain actively involved in the lives of their children may yield important dividends even years after the divorce.

The reality is that post-divorce relationships are challenging, and many parents do not put aside their negative feelings about the divorce in order to reduce the burden on their children (see Fiery Foes; Ahrons & Rogers, 1987). Consequently, most emerging adults in my study felt distant from their fathers during childhood and only recently perceived positive changes in the relationship. The fact that most participants reported changes in the father-child relationship suggests the need for additional exploration of the patterns and processes that underlie such change (e.g., divorce context, child development).

Proposition 2: Post-divorce stress influences father-child relationships

Divorce-related stressors form a context within which nonresidential father-child relationships take shape. Most emerging adults in my sample report that their parents' divorce was accompanied by a variety of stressors, many of which impacted how they felt about their fathers and the time they spent with him. Children may be ill-equipped to handle stressful interactions with their fathers, fathers' new partners, or between their parents and, consequently, they may feel distant from their fathers for years.

Interparental conflict and triangulation (i.e., unbalanced parent-child-parent relationships or alliances) are common and particularly problematic processes in post-divorce families (Emery, 2010). When parents use children as messengers, talk badly about one another to children, and/or expose children to ongoing conflict in the coparenting relationship, it undermines children's relationships with both parents. However, my findings suggest that fathers suffer a disproportional amount of the consequences for these problems partially because they seldom live with their children. In an effort to relieve the tension between households or remove themselves from the center of conflict, children may disengage from their fathers during childhood by avoiding visitation, limiting emotional disclosures, and/or accepting their mother's version of the divorce narrative. Thus, mothers may have a great influence on children's perceptions of their fathers and the divorce more generally.

The residential status of parents also may explain why father-child relationships are particularly vulnerable in the face of divorce-related stressors. Children's sense of "home" has implications for how they interact with both mothers and fathers. Mothers' homes represent comfort and familiarity, which is not surprising given that most children

remain in the primary custody of their mothers, often living in the home they grew up in after the divorce (Kelly, 2007). Fathers' homes, on the other hand, are unfamiliar and may not accommodate children well (e.g., no room or bed of their own; no toys). His home may also be a reminder of the dissolution of the family, which may be particularly true when fathers repartner. Interacting with stepmothers then becomes part of visitation with fathers (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Additionally, divorce represents a disruption in family life, so children may cling to the things that are most familiar to them, in this case their mothers' home and presence, and associate their father's new home with discomfort and change. The combination of interpersonal stressors (e.g., coparental conflict and triangulation) and not feeling "at home" with fathers may make interactions with fathers more difficult, causing children to disengage from him for some amount of time. Fathers also may suffer from their lack of involvement in childcare during their children's early years and be uncomfortable in the solo parent role.

Proposition 3: Emerging adult development can improve father-child relationships

Even emerging adults who are conflicted about their fathers often perceive positive changes in the relationship as they get older. One explanation is that cognitive changes accompanying emerging adulthood increase the capacity to think in different ways about past events and present interactions. Previous research suggests that emerging adults continue to develop more sophisticated cognitive abilities into their twenties (Tanner & Arnett, 2009). Specifically, they develop a greater capacity for empathy, form higher-level reasoning skills, and achieve a greater ability to accept contradictory ideas than they did as adolescents (Tanner, 2006). These skills may explain how emerging

adults reinterpret post-divorce events and negotiate new ways of interacting with their fathers that result in greater communication and contact.

Empathy may be particularly important for renewing connections between fathers and children during the transition to adulthood. Participants in my study talked about how their fathers changed (e.g., trying harder to be a dad), but it may be that they are noticing his efforts for the first time. If they can now think about the divorce from their father's perspective, they can reinterpret actions or situations that caused them stress as children in light of the difficulties he may have been facing at the time. For example, they may come to understand that a home without a bed for them did not indicate that he did not want them there or care about their comfort; rather, they may realize that their fathers lacked the resources to accommodate them more comfortably or that he did not know what they needed to feel at home. By engaging in perspective taking, emerging adults may better understand their fathers' earlier behavior and motives and encourage them to respond in positive, or at least neutral, ways when their fathers make attempts to connect with them now.

Higher-level cognitive abilities may also provide a foundation for changing expectations of the father-child relationship. Without exception, emerging adults in my study want to have a father figure in their lives, yet many continue to struggle with lingering negative feelings about their fathers. Emerging adulthood seems to provide an opportunity to accept both the good and bad in fathers, which allowed them to reconnect. For example, some participants lower their expectations of fathers because they recognize their limitations. Previous research suggests that during adolescence, children begin to see their parents as individuals rather than as simply, "mom" or "dad." For children in

post-divorce families, this awareness may occur earlier and more completely. Regardless as they reach emerging adulthood they are more likely to see their fathers as flawed people rather than failed fathers – and this is more amenable to maintaining a connection. Although emerging adulthood is largely a time of self-focus and self-discovery, participants in my study seem able to shift the focus from their own needs and expectations to a relationship built on mutual responsibility. Perhaps gaining better understanding of nonresidential fathers is part of the self-discovery process that occurs after adolescence, paralleling other post-adolescence changes such as the dissipation of rigid ideals and a greater tolerance for contradiction. At least for this sample, improved tolerance for contradiction allowed fathers who provided both support and autonomy to be valued, even if they still were responsible for occasional stressors.

Residential and other changes. Along with increased cognitive capacity for reason and empathy, emerging adulthood is accompanied by other important changes. Despite continued dependence on parents for emotional and financial support, emerging adults are more independent from their parents than is true of adolescents. Whether they go to college or not, most children move out of their parents' homes at around age 18 (Arnett, 2007). For some emerging adults, this is a transformative event in their relationships with their nonresidential father. Moving away from home makes the fathers' residential status less relevant because they now live separately from both parents. My findings indicate that this transition may prompt fathers to increase their efforts to reconnect with their emerging adult children. Many participants experience increased phone calls and financial support from fathers during college. It may be that leaving their mothers' homes eliminates some of the relationship barriers that previously existed (e.g.,

loyalty binds, maternal gatekeeping), opening the door for fathers and children to reconnect.

Becoming a legal adult also changes the nature of the non-residential parent-child relationship because children are no longer subject to the legal custody agreement outlined in their parents' divorce decree (Lux, 2010). Rather than engaging in required visitation, they are able to make choices about whether and when to see their fathers. Although some of these changes often begin informally during adolescence (Fidler & Bala, 2010; Smart, 2004), turning 18 allows for freedom from mandated parent-child contact. For some young adults, contact becomes less frequent as a consequence, but many of the participants in this study now take more personal responsibility for the relationship. They feel that adulthood brings with it new obligations to call, visit, or at least respond to fathers' bids for their time and attention. Finally, emerging adulthood relieves some of the interpersonal barriers to the father-child relationship that were the result of their mothers' negative comments about dads.

Limitations

Because the goal of grounded theory is not to generalize the results to a general population but to uncover processes, the relatively small sample size in this study is appropriate. However, this sample is mostly White and female; girls may have different experiences with their fathers following divorce than do boys. Previous research has identified father-daughter relationships post-divorce to be particularly vulnerable because daughters often have weaker relationships with fathers pre-divorce and interactions with angry mothers post-divorce are influential (Nielsen, 2011). Although systematic gender

differences did not appear in my analysis, there are not enough men in the study to make definitive statements about gender similarities and differences.

This sample also represents a select group of emerging adults - college students or college graduates. Although participants did not mention finances as influencing their decision to re-engage with their fathers, it may be that they are particularly motivated to respond to his efforts in order to meet their financial needs (e.g., tuition, room and board). College students have a more immediate need to gain the support of both parents to finance their education. Thus, the findings from this study may not be equally valid for emerging adults who do not attend college.

Finally, these data do not provide the basis for comparing post-divorce father-child relationship changes to parent-child relationships more generally. Interactions with mothers clearly influence post-divorce family relationships, yet these data do not focus on how changes in the mother-child relationship may create an environment that either encourages or discourages future father-child contact. For example, it may be that mothers also make changes in how they talk about fathers or behave toward emerging adults that allows them to become more connected to their fathers. Arnett (2004) suggests that most parent-child relationships change during emerging adulthood, but I do not know whether the changes in post-divorce families are different from those that occur in all families. It may be that some of these processes are universal or that they arise from stressful family situations of many kinds (e.g., abuse, periods of separation due to military deployment) rather than only from parental divorce. Without information from children (and parents) from other types of families, I cannot definitively say that these changes evolve as part of the divorce process.

Directions for Future Research

There is ample support in the literature that nonresidential father-child relationships are tenuous (see Kelly, 2012); however, additional research is needed to fully explore long-term post-divorce father-child relationship processes. The findings from this study suggest that cross-sectional studies of father-child relationships may only serve to highlight initial post-divorce differences between children and fathers. Future research should explore how post-divorce father-child relationships develop from childhood through adulthood, paying particular attention to the ways in which entry into early adulthood shapes the nature of father-child contact.

There is a growing literature on young adults' reflections on post-divorce family life and relationships (see Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, & Greenbaum, 2009; Nielsen, 2011). However, the lack of paired father-child data limits our understanding of the complex relational dynamics that characterize father-child relationships after divorce. The emerging adults in this study perceive changes in their fathers' attitudes and behaviors in the few years preceding the interviews, but these data do not offer insight about fathers' perceptions of relationships changes. Understanding perceptions of change from both perspectives is important to explore

I approached this study using a strengths perspective, so the goal was to identify the factors or processes that promoted resilience in father-child relationships. However, without data on participant outcomes, it remains unclear whether the relational changes identified here affect emerging adults' wellbeing. For example, is lowering expectations of fathers an adaptive strategy that leads to greater support or does it lead to disappointment in the long-term? Similarly, will participants who now feel obligated to

maintain relationships with their fathers later resent the responsibility? It is unclear whether contact with fathers helped participants to achieve some of the concrete tasks of emerging adulthood (e.g., graduating from college, becoming employed, securing independent housing, finding a healthy romantic relationship). Future research needs to address the outcomes as well as the processes that characterize post-divorce father-child relationships over time.

Finally, research is needed that explores how emerging adults in communities where non-residence of fathers is more normative (e.g., communities with high incarceration rates or high poverty) maintain or change their relationships with their fathers. It is possible that they share many traits with the more privileged sample in my study such as seeking greater autonomy and support during emerging adulthood. However, it is also likely that there are differences, if children have less expectation for sharing a residence with and being financially supported by their fathers.

Implications for Practice

This study provides evidence that even strained post-divorce relationships with fathers can be improved as children transition to adulthood. Clinicians, counselors, and advisors who wish to support divorced nonresidential fathers in maintaining or re-establishing their relationships with their children might suggest having developmentally appropriate expectations. For example, fathers may need to recognize that periods of children being distant are common, but not necessarily permanent, if a supportive presence is maintained. Even fathers that work hard to include their children in their new lives post-divorce might sense their children growing emotionally distant from them. New homes, partnerships, and routines are often not perceived positively by children, at

least initially. As children enter adolescence, many prefer to stay most of the time at one home because of access to peers and school. Even when parents have fully equal joint physical and legal custody, adolescents may choose to stay in one home, usually their mothers; most of the time (Smart, 2004). Findings from my study suggest that when this happens, fathers need to continue to call their children, invite them to their home, show up at their children's activities, and frequently "check-in" on children.

As children transition to adulthood, the urge to "parent" and discipline should be tempered, especially if relationships were distant during childhood. What emerging adults do appreciate is their fathers treating them as adults, supporting their career decisions, and making themselves available to talk about the future. Although findings from this study indicate that though those with particularly stressful father-child relationships may be slow to overcome their anger and forge closer relationships with fathers, even those with the worst memories were hopeful for better relationships in the future. Therefore, nonresidential fathers who want to have relationships with their children may need to patiently wait to establish a functional and satisfying relationship.

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Table 1: Sample Description (N=33)

Name	Type of Relationship[a]	Gender[b]	Age	Age at divorce	What percent time did you live with your father?	How would you rate your current relationship with your father?	Remarriage[c]
David	Stable (-)	M	21	3	25% or less	Good	Both
Veronica	Stable (-)	F	18	17	25% or less	Poor	Neither
Ann	Stable (+)	F	20	18	25% or less	Excellent	Neither
Brooke	Stable (+)	F	21	4	25% or less	Good	Both
Eva	Stable (+)	F	19	5	25% or less	Excellent	Both
Ingram	Stable (+)	F	21	2	25% or less	Good	Both
James	Stable (+)	M	20	1	25% or less	Excellent	Mother
Kristen	Stable (+)	F	20	7	25% or less	Good	Both
Rebecca	Stable (+)	F	20	18	nearly 100%	Good	Neither
Yvonne	Stable (+)	F	19	9	about 50%	Good	Neither
Jen	Changed (W)	F	21	3.5	25% or less	Good	Both
Sam	Changed (W)	M	22	16	about 75%	Good	Mother
Abby	Changed (W,I)	F	21	2	25% or less	Fair	Father
Amy	Changed (W,I)	F	20	9	25% or less	Good	Both
Cynthia	Changed (W,I)	F	18	12	25% or less	Poor	Neither
Dianne	Changed (W,I)	F	23	9	-	-	Both

Fiona	Changed (W,I)	F	19	2	25% or less	Excellent	Both
Gloria	Changed (W,I)	F	23	10	25% or less	Good	Neither
Gwenn	Changed (W,I)	F	21	12	25% or less	Excellent	Father
Hilary	Changed (W,I)	F	21	3	25% or less	Good	Mother
Julia	Changed (W,I)	F	18	5	25% or less	Good	Both
Liam	Changed (W,I)	M	22	13	about 50%	Excellent	Father
Lucy	Changed (W,I)	F	19	5	25% or less	Excellent	Mother
Luis	Changed (W,I)	M	19	17	25% or less	Good	Neither
Marie	Changed (W,I)	F	20	2	25% or less	Fair	Both
Natalie	Changed (W,I)	F	21	5	25% or less	Fair	Both
Penny	Changed (W,I)	F	21	17	25% or less	Good	Neither
Robert	Changed (W,I)	M	19	17	about 50%	Good	Father
Susan	Changed (W,I)	F	20	8	25% or less	Good	Neither
Sylvester	Changed (W,I)	M	20	14	about 50%	Excellent	Both
Thomas	Changed (W,I)	M	20	1	25% or less	Fair	Father
Valerie	Changed (W,I)	F	19	6	25% or less	Excellent	Neither
Zack	Changed (W,I)	M	19	17	25% or less	Excellent	Mother

Notes: [a] Stable (+) = Always positive, Stable (-) = Always negative, Changed (W) = Worsened, Change (W,I) = Worsened, then Improved; [b]M=Male, F=Female; [c]Remarriage Status of Parents

Appendix A
2009 IRB Approved Interview Protocol
[*Known edits bracketed and italicized*]

Screening Interview:
Relationship Development and Maintenance of After Divorce and Remarriage

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Are your parents divorced?
4. Are either of them remarried?
5. How old were you when your parents divorced?
6. How old were you when they remarried.
5. How much of the time do you live with your mother?
    ____Less than 25%   ____50%   ____Almost 100%
6. How much of the time do you live with your father?
    ____Less than 25%   ____50%   ____Almost 100%

Interview guide: Maintaining Nonresidential Parent-Child Relationships

Genogram and Chronology of Events

The following questions are asked for the purposes of drawing a genogram and charting the sequence of family events. The genogram and events will be drawn and displayed on a pad to refer to as necessary during the interview.

<u>Family Structure and Background</u>

I would like to start by getting a little history about you and your family.

Participant and [Nonresidential Father] Relationship:

How old are you?
How many siblings do you have?
    What are the sexes and ages of your siblings?
What are your parents' current marital statuses?
Tell me about your parent's separation (and divorce, if applicable) –
When did they separate?
    When did they divorce?
    What are the legal and physical custody arrangements for you and your siblings?
        [Probe for information regarding how often and when children are in each parent's household]
        Has this changed since the separation/divorce? If so, describe the changes.

Parents' Current Relationships

If parents are remarried or cohabiting, ask:
When did they move in with their current partner?
[If applicable] When did they get remarried?
    What are the ages and sexes of your stepparents/their partner's children (if any)?
[probe further to find out about living arrangements of children]

What was your reaction to your parents' remarriage/cohabitation? Have your feelings about this changed at all?

Do your parents' have children with their new partner?

If yes: what are the ages and sexes of those children?

Post-divorce Parenting [*To be done chronologically*]

Current Custody Arrangement

Can you describe the frequency and types of contact you have with your nonresidential parent?

Can you describe what typically happens when you have contact?

Relationship Maintenance with Nonresidential Parent

How have you managed to maintain contact with your nonresidential parent after the divorce?

What have you done to maintain a relationship with your parent after the divorce? What has your parent done?

What, if anything, has helped you to continue to maintain the relationship with your nonresidential parent? What, if anything, has hindered your relationship after the divorce?

How has your relationship with your parents changed or stayed the same since they separated? How has your relationships with your parents changed or stayed the same since the divorce? [ask about both parents.]

Satisfaction

How satisfied [*were*] you with your custody arrangement? Ask for explanation for how satisfied they are.

How is the current co-parenting arrangement working for you?

How satisfied are you with how much you see your nonresidential parent? How satisfied are you with the relationship you have with your nonresidential parent since the divorce?

Additional Demographic Information *[to be done with genogram,]*

What is your ethnicity?

Is anyone on the diagram of a different ethnicity from you?

If yes: What is their ethnicity?

What is your highest level of education?

What is your mother's occupation and highest level of education?

What is your father's occupation and highest level of education?

Follow-up

Would you be willing to let us contact you for follow-up questions or an interview in the future?

[New Sample: How would you rate your current relationship with your father? (Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent)]

Appendix B: Consent

Parent-Child Relationships Study

You are invited to participate in a study of parent-child relationships being conducted by Drs. Marilyn Coleman and Lawrence Ganong of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Missouri. The purpose of this research is to better understand various family relationships after divorce and/or remarriage. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed three times. Each interview will take about an hour, although the second and third may be shorter. In return for participation, you will receive a Target gift card with a value of ten dollars ($10.00) after each interview.

Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and there will be no negative consequences if you choose not to participate. You are free to stop participating at any time or to choose not to participate in any part of the project. There are no penalties for stopping. The study methods have little known risks, but participation may cause you some discomfort due to the topics we will discuss. However, these risks are no greater than discussing sensitive issues with friends and family in an everyday setting. If you experience any problems as a result of participating in the study, the study will be stopped immediately and a list of supportive services will be provided to you. You will be encouraged to contact the principal investigator with any problems or concerns. The benefit of participation is that you can contribute to knowledge about family relationships following parental divorce and remarriage. There is also a chance you will enjoy thinking about and discussing your family experiences and relationships.

All information that is obtained during the study will be kept confidential. The information you provide will be identified only by a randomly assigned number. Only the principal investigator (Dr. Coleman) will have access to the list of names of participants and corresponding identification numbers.

The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed later. No names will be used in the transcribed (word processed) interviews. Tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet to which only authorized research personnel have access. Only the co-investigators and their research assistants will see the word processed interviews. Neither you nor anybody in your family will be identifiable from reported results. The one exception to our rule of strict confidentiality is that we are legally obligated to report allegations of child abuse and to intervene if any participant reports an intention to harm him- or herself or others.

If you agree to participate, please sign on the line below. Your signature indicates your willingness to participate. You are entitled to, and will be offered a copy of this form to keep. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Marilyn Coleman at (573) 882-4360 or Dr. Lawrence Ganong at (573) 882-6852. Also, you may contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board at 882-9585 with any questions about research involving human participants. Thank you!

____   ________________

Signature of Participant   Date

Appendix C: Abridged Themes, Categories, Codes

Themes	Categories	In-Vivo Codes
Consistent Relationships	Always close to fathers	*Always had a good relationship with [dad] (Yvonne)*
	Close proximity to fathers	*We only lived eight minutes apart (Yvonne)*
	Open access to father's home	*We pretty much [could] go right back and forth. (Ann)*
	Fathers continuously engaged	*He called a lot of times (Brooke); [Dad] will text me (Eva)*
	Lack of enmity between parents	*[Mom] didn't bash [dad], and he didn't bash her. (Rebecca)*
	Never close to fathers	*We never connected on a basic level (Veronica)*
	Long gaps in contact	*I haven't seen him in a couple of years (David)*
	Stressed by parents	*[My parents] have always been very volatile (Veronica)*
	Open to improvement	*It could get better in the future (David)*
Relationship with father changed	Worsened following divorce	*Getting distant (Gwenn); Periods of no contact (Marie)*
	Sense of loss	*I was reminded that he wasn't there (Natalie)*
	Awkwardness and discomfort around fathers	*We had to sleep on blow up mattresses (Liam); It was annoying packing to go to my dad (Valarie);[Dad's girlfriends were] weird and annoying (Julia)*
	Ongoing conflict between parents	*Big blow outs (Lucy); I felt really torn (Dianne)*
	Mothers had tarnished their fathers' image	*A lot of things being put in my head (Dianne)*
	Improved relationships during emerging adulthood	*I think [our relationship] has gotten better as time goes on (Gwenn)*
	Dad changed	*[Dad] is definitely trying harder. (Gloria); It seems like he's trying to reach out and build a relationship (Marie)*
	Calls more	*I have a lot of missed calls from [dad] and messages, and a lot of 'I love you's, which [my siblings and I] did not hear that often from him (Gloria)*
	Financially supportive	*Lately when I need something, I can call him (Cynthia)*
	Treats me as an adult	*We're a lot closer now than we used to be because it seems like we're the same age now (Marie)*
	Participant changed	*Time, maturity, getting over myself (Abby)*
	Perceived changes in their own maturity	*[Now] I understand where he's coming from more. (Gwenn)*
	Lowered their expectations of fathers	*Learned not to expect things of him (Hilary)*
	Developing a sense of obligation	*I still need to [visit him], he's my father (Thomas)*
	Taking charge of communication	*Know when to talk and when to just keep [my] mouth shut (Gloria)* *You guys can figure that out. Don't ask me about it (Lucy)*

Appendix D: Sample Memos

Cynthia (18–f)
Has an excellent current reflection on the father. He is being painted as a sympathetic figure who she cares about because he has directly told her he loves and cares for her. He directly apologized for wronging her and supports her decisions to go to school. When she needs someone to talk to, she can call him. Feels both parents wronged her, but dad is the only one to admit it.

She has the power to decide the relationships (be stable or stay out of my life), but appreciated the support and expects support from parents. Had to swallow pride to get the relationship with dad to work…daughter wanted to be left alone for a long time.

Dianne (23-f)
Participant has a very close relationship with dad. She has very positive attributions of him. Lots of contact. Leaned on him during hard times. Support in those hard times strengthened the relationship. Lots of communication technology usage.

I think this interview shows a bit of a life course piece on parent-child relationships. Despite some family stress, this could be considered a highly effective post-divorce father-child relationship. Maybe it is all about dealing with family stress, but not separating from each other. When parents are married they are forced to stick family stressors out together, while when divorce they can disengage. Those that stay engaged with kids are the ones with positive relationships?

Family of Origin info; Parent separated before divorce 3 years. Divorce was 10+ years ago; Dad remarried (for 10 years) and divorced again (for 3), Half sibs from previous marriage. Close with half sibs. Mom a manager, dad owns a company.

Divorce process info: Divorce was messy at age 9, bad mouthing adults early on upset daughter. Mellowing of parents, they helped each other see their kids and she lived close to both parents (10 min). Got a dog post-divorce from dad, Home Improvement became THEIR show. It was a ritual. So was cooking with dad a lot, he taught her to cook, played games with her, and called her on the phone every night, Thinks dad is very sentimental.

Distance, then improvement: Relationship with dad quiet for a year, daughter did not like stepmom and mad at dad for not saying he got remarried. Now, she says ‘I try to talk to him’ once a week contact and have some email contact (dad emails). Dad shows he cares and talking is the ritual now (instead of tv and cooking). Now that she is older she is fine with the limited contact, but when younger felt she was “missing out”. She wanted time with dad without taking time from mom (paradox). Homesick early in college and early in college contact with dad because of this homesickness “I needed that support from dad”

Brooke (21-f)

Ok relationship with non-res dad. I would say positive and functional, but not as close as with mom. Number of similar factors as others. I am curious about the idea of supportive extended family on the residential side it helpful, but extended family on the non-res side might not be as helpful, not sure if these is true, but the topic comes up. Flexible coparenting is mentioned, but parents fought a lot a first and became more civil

after a couple years. Dad's 'willingness' to stay a parent was important, but her 'willingness' to keep contact mattered too.

Thinking across interviews: During childhood, adjusting to the stressors of post-divorce family life (e.g., dealing with coparental conflict, confronting fathers' shortcomings, establishing new routines) strained the relationships between children and their nonresidential fathers. As they reached emerging adulthood, participants had a strong desire to maintain or create a connection to their fathers; thus they often had to manage contradictory feelings of love and resentment toward their fathers. Based on the available data, I would hypothesize that emerging adults' increased capacity for perspective taking and reasoning provided them with new insights about their fathers following their parents' divorces. These data indicate that emerging adults learned how to manage contradictory feelings about their fathers by accepting the relationship for both its good and bad qualities.

Children whose parents exposed them to loyalty conflicts and triangulation post-divorce became frustrated and often disengaged from fathers. As emerging adults, however, they were able to use their greater independence and their improved facilities for reasoning in order to manage the contradiction of loving their fathers despite negative feelings and memories about him. The two most common methods for managing their ambivalence involved establishing a supportive peer relationship with fathers and adjusting their expectations of their fathers. Not all emerging adults found ways to enjoy their time with their fathers, or could find compelling enough reasons to ignore previous resentment towards him. However, emerging adults found other justifications to engage with their fathers. Although they still mourned the loss of their pre-divorce family, the experience of emerging adulthood presented a space for accepting their father, and their family, for what it was rather than what it could have been.

Valerie (19-f)

This is an example of a very high level parent-child relationship. It seems on both sides, with both parents, but especially in terms of the NRF. The factors she said help was the proximity of dad, her parent's high functioning coparental ability, and dad waiting on his own relationships. Dad has a girlfriend (fiancée) now, but she is a neutral figure in life. It is interesting how the things participants desire to change about their family life are so different depending on the parenting relationship. This story makes me think of whether it is the divorce that is causing issues or simply a lack of father involvement or responsibility post-divorce.

Family of origin info: Divorced 13 years; Married for 25 years; Supportive grandparents; Supportive grandparents and aunt.

Divorce processes info: Good coparenting throughout. Time with dad during the week during childhood was valued. Parents lived in same town. No custody fights, but complex custody plan during childhood. Now just go over whenever, schedule dictated custody when they got older and it became daughter's choice when to see father. Felt awkward around dad's current girlfriend at first, but has gotten over it, worried about dad being lonely so ok with the girlfriend now. Still a little friction over her soon to be step mom being around her dog though. She feels closer to dad now. Notices his financial support and thinks he helps out. Packing was annoying – reflection on whose house is

home (both in this situation). Great support in this interview about the importance of knowledge about parenting and development.

Hilary (21-f)

Not the best relationship with NRF, but has a relatively positive view of him. Lots of good quotes on managing dad, or at least discussing the process of dad understanding what he should do to build connection and support.

Important things to do for an adolescent to show support:

Go to sporting events; Call them; Be flexible in custody; Don't bad mouth other parent

Important things to do for an EA;

Be flexible, call them, but let them call you; Be generous with $; Don't bad moth other parent

Perceptions of Nonres Dad: Needed dad for insurance. Good relationship with dad. There for each other, but have not always been around each other. Dad had to keep contact up because we're his children. Lunch w/ dad, and dad is a friend.

Learned not to expect things. Low expectations of dad. Still some stress with interactions with him. Promised money that never came, Spells her name wrong on cards still and it bothers her.

Thinking across interviews: It seems that emerging adulthood facilitated two important changes in participants' relationships with their nonresidential fathers. Once they became legal adults, father-child contact was no longer guided by the custody arrangements outlined in the legal divorce agreement. After leaving for college, some emerging adults tended to take on additional responsibility for maintaining their relationships with their fathers. They made choices about when to visit or call, and decided how much to integrate their fathers into their lives. It could be that emerging adults' increased cognitive capacity for empathy and perspective taking provided them with new insights about their fathers' parenting following their parents' divorces. Reflecting on their past memories of their fathers and assessing his involvement in their lives as emerging adults had important implications for whether (and how) they engaged in relationship maintenance techniques later on.

VITA

Richard Feistman received his Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology from Columbia University in 2002 and his Master’s Degree in the Teaching of Social Studies from Teachers’ College, Columbia University in 2004. Before returning to graduate school he worked for the New York Public School System as a middle school teacher as well as China and Cambodia training educators.