

# FATHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR CO-PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS POSTDIVORCE

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY PRACTICE AND LEGAL REFORM\*



Joyce A. Arditti and Michaelena Kelly\*\*

*Data from 225 divorced fathers were used to test the explanatory power of a set of variables in predicting the quality of co-parental relationships postdivorce. A standard multiple regression analysis revealed that a significant amount of variance in co-parental relationships was explained by five of the ten variables under investigation. Fathers who reported more positive relationships with their ex-wives: (a) were more satisfied with their custody arrangements, (b) were more likely to blame themselves for the breakup of their marriage, (c) discussed a greater number of topics with their ex-wives, (d) had higher educational levels, and (e) reported greater feelings of closeness to their children before the divorce. Implications of the findings for practice and legal reform are discussed.*

Recent research on the effects of divorce indicates that the relationship between ex-spouses is a crucial, albeit often overlooked, factor in the postdivorce adjustment of mothers, fathers, and children (Ambert, 1989; Furstenburg & Cherlin, 1991; Masheter, 1991). Systems theory suggests that a divorce does not end the relationship between two individuals but transforms it (Elkin, 1982). It is important to recognize that ex-spouses continue to exert an influence on each other directly (e.g., payment of child support) and/or indirectly (e.g., through the children) well after a divorce (Ahrons, 1981; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). From a systemic perspective, the degree of interdependence is a central concept in understanding the way relationships are constructed and maintained and is based on mutual contingency (i.e., change in one person influences another) (Scanzoni, Polonko, Teachman, & Thompson, 1989). Subsequently, the notion of *interdependence* is extremely useful in conceptualizing family relationships postdivorce—for even when the formal husband/wife relationship ceases to exist, the continuing relationship between parents, vis-a-vis their children, usually necessitates some

level of mutual involvement. Innovations in custody arrangements (i.e., joint custody and shared parenting) and increasing involvement of fathers in child-rearing serve as links requiring divorced parents to engage in frequent interactions (Ahrons & Perlmutter, 1982).

The notion of interdependence can also be reflected in research which has found that former spouses have functioned as a source of help to each other—either in the form of emotional support or instrumental assistance (Ahrons, 1980, Mitchell, 1981). Stack (1986) has suggested that this form of interdependence (using the former spouse as a source of social support) tends to be discouraged given the social attitude that it is best for divorcing couples to make a “clean break.” Contact between ex-spouses has typically been viewed in the past as pathological and an indication of separation distress (Kressel, Lopez-Morillas, Weinglass, & Deutsch, 1978). However, a growing body of evidence has pointed to the benefits of more harmonious co-parental relationships, given the detrimental effects of continued interparental conflict on children (Emery, 1988; Furstenburg & Cherlin, 1991; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox,

1989) and adults (Ambert, 1989; Kitson, 1992; Masheter, 1991)

Research focusing on the co-parental relationship from the noncustodial father's perspective is relatively sparse in the divorce literature. Information about noncustodial fathers is all too often obtained from mothers and may not accurately describe fathers' postdivorce experiences. For example, discrepancies between mothers' and fathers' reports have arisen in the areas of father involvement postdivorce (Ahrons, 1983; Seltzer, 1991; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988), child support payment (Beller & Graham, 1986; Wright & Price, 1986), and the quality of relations between ex-spouses (Ambert, 1989; Goldsmith,

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\*\*Joyce A. Arditti is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Family and Child Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0416. Michaelena Kelly is a Deputy Probation Officer for the County of Ventura Corrections Services Agency, Ventura, CA 93009.

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1981; Spanier & Thompson, 1984). To truly understand the nature and implications of men's and women's interdependence postdivorce, inclusion of fathers' perspectives is essential.

Both Ahrons (1981) and Clarke-Stewart and Bailey (1990) suggest that men and women are sensitive to different issues in developing postdivorce relationships with their former mates. Masheter (1992) also emphasizes the importance of considering both spouses' interpretations of various episodes and discussions in understanding relationship dialectics in postdivorce relationships between ex-spouses. Her use of *episode analysts* highlighted differences between ex-spouses in interpreting recounted conversations that occurred before and after the divorce. Although we do not have data on both spouses' perceptions, we can at least provide some balance to the literature in this area by analyzing fathers' (vs. mothers') perceptions of their relationships postdivorce. Fathers' perspectives are valid in and of themselves, even from a systems framework, because the concept of interdependence implies that change in any subsystem can have important consequences for the entire family (Goldsmith, 1981). Thus, fathers' perceptions have the potential to influence men's participation with their children, their actual behavior toward their former spouse, and in general have systemic significance for postdivorce family functioning (Serovich, Price, Chapman, & Wright, 1992).

The present study sought to identify key factors related to the quality of the relationship between ex-spouses from fathers' perspectives. While specific variables may have been identified in previous research, they have generally been presented in a manner that is fragmented, exploratory (most often utilizing univariate statistics), and atheoretical. This study builds on previous research by including certain variables that have generally been ignored, most notably variables pertaining to the legal process of divorce and qualitative aspects of the father-child relationship pre- and postdivorce, and considering their collective ability to explain variance in postdivorce relationship quality between ex-spouses

### *Factors Related to Co-parental Relationships*

The choice of variables for inclusion in the present analysis was guided by several considerations. First, in keeping with the theoretical premise of systemic interdependence, we were interested in

variables that either necessitated some form of interdependence, or had the potential to influence fathers' perceptions and, in turn, impact on their relationships with their ex-wives. From a theoretical as well as empirical basis, custody status and men's satisfaction with their custody arrangements appear to be important factors affecting the quality of relations between former spouses. Several characteristics of harmonious relationships, such as frequent interaction, nonparental interactions, and the perception of a mutually supportive relationship, are more likely to be reported by parents who share childrearing in joint custody arrangements (Ahrons, 1981; Ambert, 1988; Hobart, 1990; Luepnitz, 1986; Pearson & Thoennes 1990). Similarly, conversational content captures an important feature of ex-spouses' communication that reflects something about the nature of their interdependence. Researchers have found an association between high quality relationships and the ability of former spouses to discuss matters pertaining to personal problems as well as to the children (Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987; Spanier & Thompson, 1984).

We were also interested in identifying empirically relevant variables on several systemic levels. First, perceptions about the self in relation to the divorce process were considered. This encompassed fathers' perceptions of whom was to blame for the divorce. If the decision to divorce was not mutual, or if a great deal of pain and resentment lingers due to a hostile proceeding, friendship is unlikely (Ambert, 1989; Fishel & Scanzoni, 1990). Studies consistently have shown that positive relations between former spouses are less likely when the wife made the decision to divorce (Goldsmith, 1981; Metts, Cupach, & Bejlovec, 1989) and that couples are more likely to remain friends when the man initiated the divorce or the decision was mutual. Spanier and Thompson (1984) found that men who blamed their spouses or outsiders for the breakup of the marriage had greater feelings of postdivorce anger directed toward their former wives.

Second, information pertaining to the father-child subsystem was included in the study. Fathers' perceptions about the quality of their relationship with their children was hypothesized to be relevant to the quality of their co-parental relationships. Information about the father-child relationship also reflects systemic properties about the self in relation to others. There is a dearth of research that specifically addresses any connection between qualitative aspects of the father-child relationship and co-

parental relations postdivorce. Furthermore, it is possible that the implications of father-child relations are different depending on whether one is considering father involvement/closeness pre- or postdivorce. Hoffman (1983) found that postmarital conflict was more likely when the father assumed a more active parental role *prior* to the divorce. She speculated that postdivorce conflict may result in part from anger that may be directed toward the former wife who is blamed for restricting the father's participation and limiting rights and responsibilities that he may have enjoyed during the marriage. Recent evidence by Kruk (1992) also suggests that intense predivorce father-child relationships seemed to be problematic for fathers after divorce. Conversely, Fishel and Scanzoni (1990) found that greater paternal involvement *postdivorce* increased the amount of parenting support the mother received, which resulted in the children having more positive feelings toward the father. Thus, mothers who reported greater father involvement also reported having better relationships with their ex-spouses.

Third, we were interested in fathers' perspectives about their divorce experiences within the macrosystem. The macrosystem seems especially influential to the co-parental relationship because it encompasses legal policies that set the tone for how former spouses should interact. Little attention has been focused on the role of the legal process in determining the nature of postdivorce relationships, despite the fact that the way the marriage is legally terminated has a great influence on whether the couple's conflicts will be resolved or whether the stage will be set for additional conflict in the postdivorce period (Elkin, 1982; Spanier & Thompson, 1984). Divorcing couples typically quarrel over property, money, and custody. While the best way to resolve these disputes is not entirely clear, disagreements in these areas often result in tension, conflict, and resentment (Ahrons, 1981; Ambert, 1989; Anderson, 1989; Ponzetti & Cate, 1987). Dissatisfaction with custody arrangements and property settlements can contribute to a sense of unfairness, which may serve as a source of anger towards a former spouse (Arditti & Allen, 1993; Metts, Cupach, & Bejlovec, 1989).

Finally, various background variables are important in considering influences on co-parental relationships postdivorce. The number of children a couple shares appears to have bearing on co-parental relationships. The more children involved, the more likely that co-parental relationships will be conflictual.

Table 1  
Sample Descriptors (N = 225)

Variable	M	SD
Age	37.5	7.0
Education (yrs. schooling)	14.1	2.9
Number of children	1.7	.8
Number of months divorced	25.7	16.1
Number of months married	79.1	66.3
	f	%
Remarried		
No	159	70.7
Yes	66	29.3
Religious affiliation		
Protestant	130	57.8
Catholic	10	4.4
Jewish	2	.9
Other	65	28.9
Atheist, Agnostic, none	18	8.0
Race		
African American	5	2.2
Hispanic	2	.9
Asian	1	.4
Native American	3	1.3
Caucasian	213	94.7
Other	1	.4
Income		
Less than \$5,000	4	1.8
\$5,000-\$9,999	8	3.6
\$10,000-\$14,999	17	7.6
\$15,000-\$19,999	26	11.6
\$20,000-\$24,999	18	8.0
\$25,000-\$29,999	16	7.1
\$30,000-\$39,999	43	19.1
\$40,000-\$49,999	35	15.6
\$50,000 or more	53	23.6

Having greater numbers of children present necessitates greater interdependence between ex-spouses, thus increasing the possibility of disagreements, confrontations, and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, custodial mothers with more children often receive a smaller proportion of needed support from their ex-husbands in terms of money and childcare than mothers with fewer children (Fishel & Scanzoni, 1990). Ambert (1989) is quite explicit regarding the potential negative implications of interdependence because of children: "Dependency on the other ex-spouse whether for childrearing, money, or social considerations is not conducive to peace after divorce" (p. 58).

Variation in the quality of these relationships can also be explained, in part, by socioeconomic status (SES). In general, higher SES is associated with more positive co-parental relationships postdivorce. A difficult economic situation may reduce the possibility of a positive ex-spousal relationship—especially for husbands (Fishel & Scanzoni, 1990; Hobart, 1990). SES's influence is also largely indirect—various characteristics of higher SES groups (and better educated groups), such as fewer children, lower levels of physical or emotional abuse, and a greater "tolerance" for disagreement, are also positively correlated

with amicable postdivorce relationships (Ambert, 1988; Coysh, Johnston, Tschann, Wallerstein, & Kline, 1989; Hobart, 1990; Pearson & Thoennes, 1990). Furthermore, couples with higher educational levels may be more skilled at negotiating outcomes in line with their preferences (Beller & Graham, 1986; Teachman, 1991), which in turn may be related to friendlier co-parental relations.

To summarize, based on the available literature as well as our theoretical perspective (i.e., systemic interdependence), we hypothesized that factors predicting more harmonious postdivorce relationships, at least from the fathers' perspective, would be: joint custody, legal and custody satisfaction, lesser involvement/closeness with children prior to divorce, greater closeness with children postdivorce, blaming oneself for the divorce, discussions on a wider range of topics with their former spouses, the presence of fewer children, and higher educational levels.

## METHOD

### Sample

Public records of the divorce courts in two counties in southwestern Virginia were used to identify the populations of this study. Criteria for selection from the court records included having children, not having sole custody of those children, and having been granted a divorce between 1986-1990. Table 1 summarizes various descriptors for the sample. Out of the 695 surveys that were mailed, 202 were not deliverable, 261 were not returned, and 232 were returned completed, resulting in a cooperation rate of 47% (7of the 232 were not utilized in the study because the fathers did not meet the criteria reported above for selection).

### Instrumentation

The respondents completed a shortened version of a survey instrument developed by Spanier and Thompson (1984) that gathers information pertaining to an individual's adjustment to separation and divorce. This instrument was modified to obtain specific information on noncustodial fathers (Arditti, 1992a, 1992b). Questions were selected from the survey which were hypothesized to be related to the co-parental relationship: custody arrangement (joint or mother sole custody), custody satisfaction, satisfaction with property settlement, topics of discussion, education, predivorce closeness to children, change in closeness to children postdivorce, number of children, assigned blame for breakup,

and lawyer's influence (see the Appendix for the specific questions used and coding). Similar to an instrument developed and used by Ahrons (1981), the topics of discussion variable consisted of a checklist of a range of topics ex-spouses could conceivably discuss such as children, personal problems, and finances.

The dependent variable, quality of the co-parental relationship, was actually a composite of two 5-point Likert-type scale survey items that assessed the degree to which fathers reported agreeing with their former spouses on childrearing (ranging from *always agree* to *never agree*) and how they rated the quality of their relationship with their former spouses (ranging from *very good* to *very bad*). Thus, high scores indicate poorer relationship quality, while low scores reflect better relationship quality. The creation of this variable was guided by theoretical and statistical considerations. Ahrons (1981) defines issues related to childrearing and relationship quality as part of the co-parental relationship. Furthermore, the two items (i.e., agreement on childrearing and relationship quality) were significantly correlated ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ).

## RESULTS

A standard multiple regression analysis was utilized to test the ability of the 10 independent variables identified in the previous section to explain variance in the fathers' perceptions of the quality of their co-parental relationships. A correlation matrix of the variables used in the multiple regression analysis was produced (see Table 2) and inspected to check for multicollinearity. None of the independent variables were correlated with each other strongly enough to threaten the quality of the regression analysis. In addition to utilizing the correlation matrix as a means of checking for multicollinearity, the tolerance value of each variable used in the multiple regression equation was checked. Tolerance values are given in the far right column in Table 3. In regression, multicollinearity may be detected by low tolerance values (Norusis, 1985; Tabachnick & Fidell, 1983). The tolerance values in the present analysis were acceptably high.

Table 3 summarizes the results of the multiple regression analysis. The strength and direction of the relationship between variables are indicated by the standardized regression coefficients ( $B$ ) and  $t$  values indicating whether or not the relationships were significant. The square of the part coefficient ( $R^2$  change) indicates how much  $R^2$  increases when a variable is added to the regression equa-

**Table 2**  
*Correlations Between Independent and Dependent Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Custody arrangements	1.00										
Custody satisfaction	-.22**	1.00									
Predivorce closeness to children	-.06	.02	1.00								
Postdivorce closeness to children	.02	-.00	.05	1.00							
Lawyers' influence	.13	-.04	.02	-.08	1.00						
Satisfaction with settlements	.19**	-.16*	.02	-.07	-.01	1.00					
Assigned blame for marital breakup	-.06	-.09	.09	-.05	.12	.11	1.00				
Education	.01	.23**	.10	-.01	.13	-.18**	.08	1.00			
Number of children	-.07	.13	.08	-.06	.03	-.13	.13	.07	1.00		
Topics of discussion	-.13	-.01	.04	-.05	-.03	.16	.15*	-.04	.11	1.00	
Co-parental relationship	.42**	-.07	.11	.03	.12*	.15*	-.16*	-.16*	.06	-.36**	1.00
Mean	2.23	3.15	1.67	2.11	2.29	4.21	1.49	14.04	1.71	1.56	6.28
SD	.42	1.50	1.26	1.24	.52	3.10	.85	2.89	.91	1.00	2.49

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

tion (Norris, 1985). Squared part coefficients of .10 and .11 for topics of discussion and custody satisfaction reveal that these two variables explained most of the variation in the quality of co-parental relationships. Small part correlations for the other variables in the equation indicate that these variables added little power in explaining variation in the quality of co-parental relationships. Taken together, the set of independent variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in co-parental relationships ( $R^2$  adj = .35). Seven of the ten independent variables emerged as significant predictors of the perceived quality of the co-parental relationship.

Fathers' satisfaction with custody arrangements was the most important factor affecting the quality of co-parental relationships. Low satisfaction levels were associated with poor co-parental relations; the more satisfied a father was with his custody arrangements, the more likely he was to have a friendly co-parental relationship with his ex-wife.

The second strongest predictor was the number of topics that former spouses discussed. The wider the range of topics discussed between former spouses (i.e., parental and nonparental topics), the better the relationship quality from the fathers' perspective.

As expected, both fathers' educational levels and number of children were related to the quality of co-parental relationships. Fathers with higher educational levels and fewer children were more likely to report friendlier, more cooperative relationships with their former spouses. Also as expected, satisfaction with the property settlement was predictive of more amicable relationships with former spouses.

While we expected fathers' closeness to their children prior to divorce to be associated with poor co-parental relationships, we found the opposite to be true. Fathers who reported close relationships with their children predivorce

were more likely to positively rate their ex-spousal relationship as well. Assumed blame for the breakup of the marriage was also a significant predictor, as the more responsibility a man assumed for the dissolution of his marriage, the better the quality of relations with his former wife.

In summary, the portrait that emerged from this analysis suggests the following: fathers who were satisfied with their custody arrangements and legal property settlement, discussed a greater number of topics with their former spouses, had higher educational levels and fewer children, reported close relationships with their children predivorce, and took greater blame for the divorce, reported more positive and cooperative relationships with former spouses.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which a set of theoretically and empirically relevant variables explained variation in the quality of co-parental relationships as reported by divorced fathers. Our findings should

be viewed with caution, however, due to the possibility of selection bias for the sample. While our cooperation rate in terms of response was reasonable, it is unknown whether those fathers who completed and returned their surveys were qualitatively different from fathers who chose not to return the survey or who we were unable to reach due to changes in address. It is possible that the men participating in our study represent a more involved group (i.e., more likely to visit, pay child support) of fathers than those fathers who did not answer the survey. Furthermore, our results may not be generalizable to all fathers given the homogenous nature of the sample (i.e., predominately white, protestant, and middle class).

With these cautions in mind, results from this investigation partially supported our hypotheses in terms of the direction of effects and the significant explanatory power of these variables taken together. As expected, custody satisfaction, number of topics discussed, the presence of fewer children, taking more blame for the breakup, and satisfaction with property settlements were positively related to relationship quality. Unex-

**Table 3**  
*Multiple Regression Analysis: Variables Related to the Co-parental Relationship*

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	$R^2$ Change	Tolerance
Custody satisfaction	.59	.36	6.16***	.11	.87
Topics of discussion	-.83	-.34	-6.00***	.10	.92
Education	-.16	-.19	-3.29**	.03	.88
Predivorce closeness to children	.27	.14	2.51**	.02	.97
Number of children	.41	.15	2.69**	.02	.93
Satisfaction with property settlement	.11	.14	2.36*	.01	.86
Assigned blame for marital breakup	-.38	-.13	-2.30*	.01	.91
Lawyers' influence	.51	.11	1.91	.01	.95
Custody arrangements	.27	.05	.80	.00	.87
Change in postdivorce closeness to children	.03	.01	.26	.00	.98

Note.  $R^2$  adj. = .35\*\*\*  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

pected findings included the lack of significance of custody arrangements and the direction of the significant effect for predivorce closeness with children. Two variables in particular, custody satisfaction and topics of discussion, explained much of the variation in the quality of fathers' co-parental relationships and will be highlighted in this discussion.

The significance of custody satisfaction in predicting outcomes in the quality of co-parental relationships was consistent with results of previous research which found that positive relations between ex-spouses were more likely when fathers were satisfied with their custody arrangements (Goldsmith, 1981; Wright & Price, 1986). A dissatisfied father may resent his ex-wife due to feelings of being excluded from his children's lives. If a man is denied the custody arrangements he hopes for, he may hold his ex-wife responsible, exacerbating angry or hostile feelings. Previous qualitative analyses of these data support this contention (Arditti & Allen, 1993). Custody satisfaction has also emerged as an important social-psychological variable predictive of other postdivorce outcomes, including visitation frequency and child support payments, and appears to be more important than the *actual* custody arrangement (Arditti & Keith, 1993).

The co-parental relationship was also significantly related to the number of topics that former spouses discussed. Our findings confirmed previous research which found that when ex-spouses communicated about a greater number of topics (some unrelated to their children), they would have a better relationship (Ahrns & Wallisch, 1987; Spanier & Thompson, 1984). The significance of this finding not only lies in its ability to explain variation in co-parental relationships, but also its theoretical relevance to the concept of interdependence discussed earlier. Discussing a wider range of topics implies more extensive and satisfactory communication between former spouses, as well as a reliance on each other to discuss parental issues, personal problems, and other nonparental matters. Of course, the multiple regression analysis does not allow us to presume a causal direction. It is plausible that the relationship between the topics of communication and co-parental relationship quality is reciprocal—those spouses with better quality relations are more likely to discuss a variety of issues together which, in turn, positively influences their relationship. Research that utilizes time series data and/or causal modeling would be particularly useful in disentangling the process.

## *Implications for Practice*

Given that divorce is becoming an increasingly likely life experience for many couples, there is a greater need and responsibility for both legal and mental health professionals to consider those factors related to positive postdivorce co-parental relationships. Suggestions for practitioners are offered, based not only on the results of this study, but also upon the broader issues that facilitating relationships postdivorce may raise.

Practitioners need to assess couples' levels of interdependence considering the number of shared children, financial and educational resources of each parent, and each parent's perceptions of self-blame. Our findings suggest that while some of these factors are not subject to manipulation (education, number of children), it is important for family practitioners to have a means of identifying families at risk for hostile, noncooperative postdivorce relationships. Results suggest that less educated couples with larger families are at greater risk for poor co-parental relationships.

A presumption of interdependence also allows practitioners to deal with only one parent, fathers in this instance, and still provide intervention that has the potential to affect the co-parental relationship as a whole. Helping fathers work through feelings of victimization (i.e., blaming the ex-spouse for the divorce) as well as examine their beliefs about their custody arrangements could positively influence their relationships with former spouses. For those fathers who are displeased with custody arrangements, exploring possible ways to improve the situation or work within the constraints of nonresidential parenting arrangements is essential. Effective intervention necessitates fathers' redefining their roles to accommodate the changes in their relationship with their children brought on by the divorce and subsequent custody decisions (Wilbur & Wilbur, 1988).

Practitioners also need to acknowledge the interdependence that exists between relationships in the family. The quality of fathers' relationships with their children has implications for the quality of men's relationships with their former spouses. Our results suggest that predivorce closeness to children enhances the quality of fathers' postdivorce relationships with their children's mothers. Feelings of closeness to children may serve as an important motivator or incentive for fathers to get along with their ex-wives to facilitate their postdivorce relationships with children. Reports of greater predivorce closeness to children,

on the part of fathers reporting better co-parental relationships, may also reflect something about a father's interpersonal skills. Perhaps these fathers have better communication and relationship skills that serve not only to enhance their relationships with their children, but also their relationships with their ex-wives. Finally, the finding that fathers who reported being especially close to their children predivorce also reported better relations with their ex-wives may suggest another important benefit of fathers' involvement with children that is rarely considered.

The incorporation of postdivorce counseling/educational programs within the context of the court or mental health systems would be a valuable resource for divorcing couples and their children. The goals of such programs could be to help parents reach an amicable agreement, open up channels of communication, and define parental roles postdivorce. Educational programs could be the context for exploring the implications of former spouses' continued financial and emotional interdependence postdivorce, as well as providing information pertaining to effective conflict resolution methods. These types of programs could potentially minimize the ambiguities that encourage conflict, for a high degree of boundary ambiguity (i.e., lack of clarity regarding a person's "place" in the family system) generally presents barriers for effective postdivorce reorganization (Boss, Greenburg, & Pearce-McCall, 1990).

## *Implications for Legal Reform*

Results of this study suggest that men's satisfaction levels in the area of custody and property settlement outcomes have bearing on the co-parental relationship postdivorce. The availability of mediation or conciliation programs are an important resource for divorcing families, especially in terms of their potential to facilitate custody satisfaction. These programs can serve as either an alternative to adversarial proceedings (i.e., litigation) or as a precursor to litigation. Existing evidence already suggests that divorce mediation can successfully divert a large percentage of cases from the more expensive custody hearing. Furthermore, agreements are reached more quickly in mediation, and mediated agreements tend to last longer (McIsaac, 1986-1987). Divorce mediation is also potentially a means to negotiate settlement outcomes in a nonadversarial climate and often viewed as a way of facilitating cooperation between former spouses (Scott & Emery, 1987).

However, it is unknown from our data exactly what about the legal process contributed to men's satisfaction with their settlements. Specifically, we do not know whether more satisfied fathers went through litigation or mediation. We are also not recommending blanket reform in this area, given that it is not entirely clear whether mediation serves mothers' and children's best interests (Emery & Wyer, 1987) or how mediation may impact on other postdivorce outcomes like child support payment (Arditti & Keith, 1993). We also acknowledge that there are certain problems or issues that mediation may not effectively address. Furstenburg and Cherlin (1991) point out that while mediation may be able to help the majority of parents, there are still some highly conflicted couples who are unable to resolve their disputes during mediation.

In addition to mediation, there needs to be a much greater interface between family practitioners, lawyers, judges, and policymakers. Despite the fact that lawyers and judges may know little about family dynamics postdivorce, they are responsible for defining the parameters of family reorganization and subsequent interaction. More often than not, family law is uninformed-policy is executed in a relatively haphazard fashion with little input from family scholars, therapists, and others who may have valuable information from which to guide decision making. The common rationale is that changes in family law are technical matters that need only concern legal professionals (Jacob, 1988). Lawyers have typically been seen in a negative light by divorcing individuals—inherent in the adversarial process is a lawyer's responsibility to represent one of the competing parties and to make a pervasive case for one side to win, which tends to exacerbate hostilities between former spouses. Given an attorney's role in determining the nature of postdivorce relationships (Anderson, 1989; Arditti & Allen, 1993), we need to create a stronger partnership between those in the family field and those in the legal profession in order to best serve families.

In conclusion, our findings contribute to our understanding of how families respond to divorce and provide impetus for social change by challenging traditionally held societal beliefs that fail to acknowledge former spouses' continued interdependence. If it became more culturally accepted for former spouses to continue their relational bonds in a positive context, then the transition from being married to being divorced

could be less threatening. More accepting attitudes could be fostered by providing mental health services that are sensitive to both fathers' and mothers' experiences, practicing informed divorce law in all states, and placing a greater emphasis on how couples continued interdependence may affect family processes during the divorce and beyond. Legal reform can contribute to more cooperative co-parenting through mediation, consultation between lawyers and family professionals, and educational programs. Such programs would be cost effective in terms of saving court time, preventing litigation, and facilitating emotional well-being for family members postdivorce.

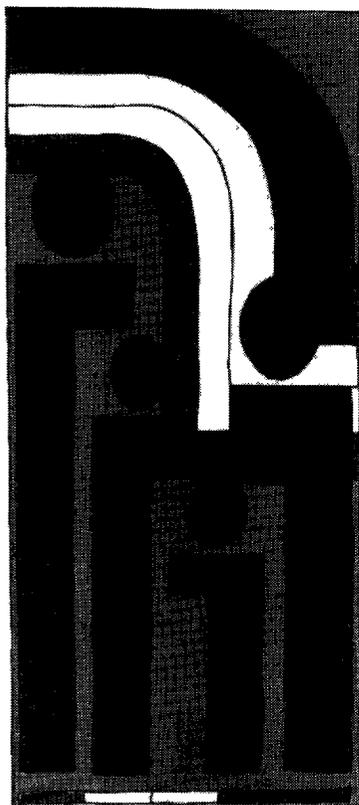
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## APPENDIX

*Variables in the model, survey questions from which the variables were derived, and the coding of those variables.*

Variable	Question	Coding
Custody satisfaction	"How satisfied are you with custody agreement?"	very satisfied = 1 not at all = 5
Topics of discussion	"When you talk to your former spouse do you usually discuss . . .?"	counted number of topics are checked
Education	"Highest level of school"	7th through graduate
Predivorce closeness to children	"How close do you think you were?"	very close = 1 not at all = 5
Number of children	"How many children did you and your spouse have?"	number of children
Satisfaction with property settlement	"How satisfied are you with division of property?"	very satisfied = 1 not at all = 5
Assigned blame for marital breakup	"Whom would you blame?"	former spouse = 1 both = 2 myself = 3
Lawyers' influence	"Would you say that dealings with lawyers made your relationship with your former spouse . . .?"	better = 1 had no effect = 2 worse = 3
Custody arrangements	"Who has custody?"	former spouse = 1 joint or split = 2
Change in postdivorce closeness to children	"Since divorce, has closeness. . .?"	increased = 1 stayed the same = 2 decreased = 3
Co-parental relations with former spouse (relationship quality)	"How would you describe quality of relationship?"	very good = 1 very bad = 5
(agreement over childrearing)	"Do you and your former spouse agree . . .?"	always = 1 never = 5



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