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Evan Shopper
The Effects of Joint Physical
Custody on Fathers and the
Father/Child Relationship

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to better understand how, following divorce, fathers and the father/child relationship are affected by joint physical custody (JPC). Specifically, how does the post-divorce family system, altered and defined by JPC, influence the father's adjustment to the divorce and his subsequent relationship to his children? While there has been considerable research focusing on noncustodial fathers and those with joint legal custody, few studies have qualitatively examined the impact of JPC on men and the father/child relationship.

The study used a semi-structured, one-hour interview to capture the subjects' specific language through an interactive method. Eleven men were interviewed about their custodial arrangement, their views of gender issues, and their relationships with their child and ex-spouse. These fathers all had JPC of at least one minor child who spent at least two nights a week on average in both the father's and mother's homes.

The major findings indicate that the men's past and current relationship with their ex-spouse significantly affected them and their relationships with their children. Specifically, the men were at various stages of transitioning from a triadic relationship (i.e. one that includes the mother) to a dyadic relationship with their child. Similarly, as pioneers of JPC, these men were also likely transitioning between traditional and nontraditional gender views. The study concludes with a discussion of the implications for the legal system and for social work practice.

THE EFFECTS OF JOINT PHYSICAL CUSTODY ON FATHERS AND THE
FATHER/CHILD RELATIONSHIP

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

Evan Shopper

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2009

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A couples therapist once quipped that marriage is the leading cause of divorce, a cynical and perhaps jaded view, but one that bears out given divorce's wide prevalence in North American society. This therapist's cynicism might be softened, however, when considering the children left to cope with the aftermath of divorce. The marital breakup divides not only the home, but left with the Solomon-like task of parceling the children to their parents, the state most often places the children in their mother's physical care, the father seeing the children on a regular but fairly infrequent basis. Generally, this is the standard practice; it is uncommon that fathers receive shared physical custody with the mother.

In recent decades, however, this trend appears to be changing. A growing—though relatively small—number of fathers are filing for and receiving joint physical custody (JPC) in which they are granted significant, if not equal, *physical* custody of their children. A new, post-divorce dynamic is emerging for these families. While considerable research has focused on conventional post-divorce familial relationships—i.e. ones in which the children reside primarily with the mother—few studies have specifically examined JPC as its own phenomenon.

The following study aims to better understand how joint physical custody affects fathers and the father/child relationship. Specifically, how does the post-divorce family system, altered and defined by JPC, influence the father's adjustment to the divorce and his subsequent relationship to his children? Understanding the dynamics of this growing

population of JPC families will facilitate both practitioners and policy makers in helping families that are recovering from the challenges and stressors of divorce.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

While this study focuses on the effects of joint physical custody (JPC) on fathers and the father/child relationship, it is necessary to place JPC in an historical context. As the father's role in the post-divorce family has evolved, so too has the research that followed these men. In the review to follow, the fathers' limited post-divorce involvement and subsequent child adjustment will first be discussed. Next will follow a brief examination of how gender roles are evolving to foster increased father involvement. This chapter will conclude with a review of the current literature regarding the specifics of JPC in an historical context of earlier, joint legal custody (JLC) literature.

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this literature review, sole physical custody, primary-residence, and sole-residence are used interchangeably, designating that a child lives predominantly with one parent; if the child has contact with the other parent, it is usually through visitation. While having sole physical custody of the child, a parent may also share joint legal custody with the ex-partner.

Similarly, terms such as joint physical custody, dual-residency, and joint-residence reflect arrangements in which a child spends roughly an equal amount of time living with both parents.

Father Involvement Post-Divorce and Child Adjustment

The literature generally agrees that children of divorce exhibit more behavioral problems than children from intact families (Emery, 1988; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982;

Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). A significant portion of this divorce research has focused on correlating specific elements of divorce with their effects on the family, especially on the children. With respect to father involvement, the views have ranged from claims that father involvement has no relationship to child adjustment (Richards & Goldenberg, 1986) to claims that contact with fathers contributes the most to a child's becoming self-reliant, self-disciplined, and self-motivated (Munsch et al., 1995) or, conversely, that "inadequate father-son relationships" are linked to juvenile delinquency (Warshak, 1992, p. 48). However, other studies (see Luepnitz, 1986) point out that it is not necessarily the custody type that affects child adjustment but rather the interactions with the parent; ultimately, it is the quality of time—not the quantity—that determines child outcomes. While an increased amount of father involvement does not necessarily amount to increased quality of time, Greif (1979) notes that when divorced fathers spend increased time with their children, the fathers adopt more parental responsibilities, believing that they can influence the emotional lives of their children. Warshak (1992) supports this view, noting that fathers receive so-called "on the job" training as a custodial parent, thus improving their parenting skills.

The recent literature (see Bender, 1994, for example)—as further supported by Nielsen's (1999) review of the literature and Bauserman's (2002) meta-analytic review of 33 studies comparing child adjustment in JPC, JLC, and sole custody arrangements—establishes a positive correlation between father involvement and positive outcomes with child adjustment. Nielsen (1999) notes that children who have a close relationship with their father post-divorce are more likely to be more socially mature and to have "fewer problems related to dating and sexuality" (p. 144). Similarly, Bauserman (2002) found

that when children had increased contact with their fathers through JPC and JLC, they were better adjusted.

While the majority of studies agree that increased father involvement post-divorce correlates to positive outcomes for children, these studies also agree that following divorce, the majority of fathers are not as involved in their children's lives as the mothers. This next section will examine the numerous factors that contribute to a father's post-divorce involvement.

Factors Affecting Father Involvement

In the United States, it has become an accepted—and even encouraged—practice to denigrate fathers as ineffective parents, and thus they are “disenfranchised after divorce in ways that make it difficult for them to maintain close relationships with their own children” (Nielsen, 1999, p. 139). While it may be the public conception that fathers are second-rate parents, there is more at play in what actually determines a father's involvement with his children following a divorce. One must consider not only society's attitudes towards fathers and its idealization of mothers and motherhood, but both the legal system's treatment of divorced dads and the mother/father relationship following the divorce. Lastly, post-divorce role ambiguity has also led fathers to become disconnected with their children.

Societal Attitudes Towards Fathers and Mothers

In the United States, a prevalent attitude asserts that men are not as innate or instinctive caregivers as women, and that children benefit far more from their relationship with their mother than with their father (Nielsen, 1999; Warshak, 1992). However, research does not support these assumptions. Rather than being influenced by genes,

fathers relate to their children based heavily on what their particular society, culture, and personal experience has taught them (Allport, 1997). For example, research has shown (see Emery, 1988, for example) that men have had to assume the role of family breadwinner given the pervasive economic advantages afforded to them over that of women. The public then perceives that men excel at their ability to earn an income while women excel at raising the children and managing the home. These differences need not exist in opposition, however—this is to say, men need not define themselves solely as breadwinners at the expense of their identity as parents, just as women need not define themselves solely as mothers at the expense of a career.

One might wonder if the prevalent attitude is self-perpetuating: given this societal assumption that men do not make adequate caregivers, men therefore take on, act out, and thus perpetuate this assumption. These attitudes become not only self-fulfilling but intergenerationally reinforced: today's fathers who accept their pre-determined gender roles will, through their subsequent actions—or lack thereof—teach their children how fathers should behave and feel.

Not only does the dominant North American culture deem fathers as less than capable parents, there exists the additional assumption that fathers are less interested or committed to caring for their children regardless of their abilities (Nielsen, 1999). In fact, Nielsen (1999) notes that men are more likely than women to have emotional repercussions following divorce, such as depression, stress-related illness, and suicidality: these fathers are “extremely lonely, overwrought, and disoriented—mainly because they have lost daily contact with their children” (p. 113). Because men generally are unwilling to seek help or let others know how unhappy they are, the public is largely unaware how

divorce—and the loss of their children—significantly impacts fathers (Pledge, 1992). Though the public perceives men as not interested in having custody of their children, Maccoby et al. (1993) found in their large, quantitative study (N=1124) that more than half of the men wanted sole or joint custody. Ultimately, they found that the custody arrangement “merely ratified the de facto living arrangement for the children that came into being at the time the parents separated” (p. 27). Maccoby et al. (1993) also found that many fathers who wanted sole or joint custody did not fight for this. Various factors influenced the men’s decision not to pursue joint custody: some fathers believed that the mothers were more experienced caregivers and that their children should remain with their mothers; some men found that their work restricted their ability to meet the demands of shared child rearing; some did not want to subject their families to a custody battle; and some believed their chances of acquiring joint custody was small.

The public’s general view that men distance themselves from their children post-divorce is reinforced by another public misperception that many divorced fathers do not pay adequate child support; these so-called “dead beat dads,” however, tend to be among the most poorly educated populations, have little or no income, and have never married the mother of their child (Arditti, 1992b). Arditti (1992b) also notes that statistics underestimate the amount of money fathers provide for child support because only court-ordered support is documented, leaving any voluntary giving unreported—such as college tuition. There also exists a social disparity between what is legally required of men and women with regards to child support: poor mothers are not legally required to pay child support to fathers when the child is living full-time with the father, but the

converse is true: poor fathers are required to pay this support when the conditions are reversed (Meyer & Garasky, 1993).

The legal system affects not only fathers' levels of child support but their custodial rights. In the next section, we look more closely at how the legal system may play a part in limited fathers' post-divorce involvement with their children.

Divorce and Custodial Rights

In marriage, the parenting of a child is an informal, adaptive arrangement. However, following a divorce, this arrangement often becomes a legal negotiation and contract between the parents. Historically, women have been granted custodial rights far more often than men. Despite the recent legal changes, the huge majority (from 75-90%) of divorced mothers still receive sole custody of their children, especially when the children are young (Nielsen, 1999; Seltzer, 1990). It should also be noted that a couple's custodial choice often reflects the pre-divorce division of labor: the woman most often assumes the child care while the man acts as the breadwinner (Seltzer, 1990). While fathers have increasingly been awarded custody (Department of Health and Human Services, 2000; Kelly, 2005; Meyer & Garasky, 1993; Seltzer, 1990), fewer than 2% of divorced fathers receive sole custody, and anywhere from 6-12% receive JPC (Donnelly, 1992; Maccoby et al., 1993; Nielsen, 1999; Seltzer, 1990).

The reasons for this percentage of JPC will be discussed in greater detail in the *Factors Determining JPC* section, but generally, researchers have tried to explain the degree of JPC by examining the parents' education and income levels, degree of conflict, and age of children. Additionally, Kelly (2005) noted that the courts may have a preferential view towards mothers.

While mothers were awarded sole physical and legal custody of a child, the father was granted visitation rights. These custodial arrangements tended not to change over time (Maccoby et al., 1993). Nielsen (1999) noted that men did not fight for their custodial rights because they believed it was very unlikely that the courts would grant them equal rights as parents. Instead, the courts reinforced the notion that children needed not their father's involvement in everyday life but rather his income (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1994; Warshak, 1992). When fathers lack shared legal custody, they have no voice or control regarding factors that might affect their relationship or access to their children. For example, if a mother has sole legal (and thus, physical) custody of a child, she and the child can relocate as desired. This maternal, legal right resulted in 40% of divorced fathers not residing in the same state as their child (Bender & Brannon, 1994). These fathers rarely saw their children.

The legal system controls the amount of time a father can *physically* see his child; to this degree, custodial rights can be a quantifiable, external component contributing to a father's involvement. However, the effects of internal aspects—most notably a father's emotions stemming from the parental relationship following divorce—are more elusive and thus have received considerable attention in the literature.

The Parental Relationship Post Divorce

The ongoing parental relationship is one of the most significant determinants in a child's post-divorce adjustment (Arditti, 1992a). Subsequently, the literature has focused on both post-divorce parental conflict and maternal attitudes towards the father as determinants of the father's involvement with his children. In the section to follow, I will discuss to what degree parental conflict can be correlated to custody arrangement as well

as the origins of the conflict and the effects of conflict on children. The section will conclude with a review of how maternal attitudes also affect father involvement.

Conflict as Determined by Custody Type

Researchers found that while there were higher levels of contact between JPC parents, there were no differences in parental conflict between sole or joint custody arrangements (Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990). Instead, the intensity of conflict was directly related to the degree of pre-divorce parental conflict.

Conflict between ex-spouses is most often transmitted in their communication. It follows then that parental conflict—as seen in the frequency of arguments—generally declined as the amount of communication between the parents diminished over time (Maccoby et al., 1993). However, these researchers also found that while dual-residency parents maintained higher levels of contact than their primary-residency counterparts, their communication contained no greater levels of conflict. This finding would suggest that parents with JPC tend to experience less conflict. In his meta-analytical review, Bauserman (2002) supports the finding that joint custody couples reported less conflict than sole custody couples, though here too, Bauserman admits that “selection bias cannot be ruled out” (p. 99).

Interestingly, while many studies tried to connect custody type as a determinant of post-divorce conflict, studies like Kelly, Redenebach, and Rinaman’s (2005) took a reverse approach of viewing conflict as a determinant in custody arrangement. These researchers found that couples were more likely to choose joint custody if they had lower levels of marital conflict prior to divorce. With this in consideration, studies that examine

how custody type produces conflict may not be fully considering the degree of conflict existing prior to the divorce.

Origins of Conflict

In the wake of divorce, it is often exceptionally difficult for the parents to maintain a working—not to mention a healthy—relationship that has little conflict. One study found that two months following the break up, two-thirds of the couples (N=96) experienced conflict over finances, visitation, parenting, and intimate relations with other people (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978). While the incidence of conflict between couples diminished with time, negative feelings diminished only slightly: Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) found that ten years after their original study, half the divorced couples were still angry at each other.

Post-divorce conflict has numerous possible sources, from interparental hostility from before the breakup (Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990) to the sustaining of a “quasi-spousal connection” (Green, 2007, p. 15) to the residual expression of an emotionally dependent marriage (Bader & Pearson, 1998) to conflict that is generated from the divorce itself (Kelly, 1991).

A number of studies, however, have focused specifically on conflict produced when a couple had divergent parenting styles or attitudes. For couples experiencing substantial strife with respect to joint custodial awards, the conflict was largely influenced by how the parents regarded each other’s parenting abilities: “The more discrepant the 2 parents’ views of their pre-separation roles, the greater the likelihood that there would be substantial legal conflict concerning who would have physical custody of the children”

(Maccoby et al., 1993, p. 28). Specifically, the source of conflict frequently revolved around discipline—each parent often feeling that the other was too lenient or lax.

The parents reacted to this conflict in various ways. Mothers often portrayed fathers as vastly inferior parents to their children, and this portrayal caused the children to distance themselves from their fathers (Greir, 1995; Nielsen, 1999). On the other hand, when fathers believed their children's mother was parenting in a poor manner, their involvement with their children increased (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1993). Stone (2006) supported this conclusion, adding that when fathers perceived their own parenting ability as high, their involvement was also increased: "Perhaps fathers who believe that they can parent effectively are more likely to feel confident in their interactions with their children, thus leading to more opportunities to develop a quality relationship with their child" (p. 24).

Effects of Conflict on Children

A vast number of researchers have concluded that parental conflict and hostility post-divorce are linked to adjustment difficulties in their children and increased parent/child conflict (Cookston et al., 2006; Donnelly & Finkelhor, 1992; Luepnitz, 1986; Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990; Maccoby et al., 1993; Whiteside & Becker, 2000). When there was high parental conflict, even children in joint custody arrangements who had high levels of self-esteem were more emotionally troubled and showed more behavioral problems—depression and deviancy, for example—than their sole-custody counterparts (Johnston, Kline, & Tschann, 1989; Kelly, 1993). Maccoby et al. (1993) posit that these children were often caught in the middle of the conflict, though it may not

be the conflict per se that affects children but rather the *manner* in which it is expressed (Kelly, 1993).

Custodial arrangement was a factor in how conflict (or its absence) affected children: not only were dual residency children harmed by conflict more than sole residency children, but these children benefited from cooperative communication between parents more than their sole residence counterparts (Kelly, 1993). Thus, the degree of conflict or cooperation has a greater effect on children of JPC than those of sole custody.

With respect to sole custodial arrangements, Bender and Brannon (1994) found that when parental conflict was high, the custodial mother's victimization of the non-custodial father was "rampant and pervasive" and included "emotional pain, visitation denial, [and] emotional blackmail" (p. 96). Given that prior research (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982; Kelly, 1988; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980) supports that a child's contact with both parents and, in particular, the noncustodial father results in positive outcomes for the child, Bender and Brannon (1994) equate the denial of a child's access to both parents with victimization. They write, "Judicial decision[s] resulting in sole custody may abrogate the human rights of the child—to know and love two parents—thus victimizing those children needlessly. If, as seems increasingly evident, sole custody determinations place the child's relationship with the non-custodial parent at risk, then the child's emotional well-being is also at risk, and the child is open to further emotional victimization by the custodial parent" (p. 99).

The noncustodial father's relationship to his children seems particularly susceptible to the influences of the custodial mother. Though they may not be as

vulnerable to victimization given their custody type, men with JPC also appear highly influenced by the mother's attitude toward them.

Maternal Attitudes Towards Fathers

A number of researchers have focused specifically on the mother's attitudes towards the father as a determinant in the father/child relationship. When noncustodial fathers experience cooperation, support, and positive communication from the child's mother, these fathers have consistently been more involved with their children and have had a higher quality relationship with their child (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000; Whiteside & Becker, 2000). Nielsen (1999) has a somewhat different view of the mother's influence, arguing that fathers and their children stay close after a divorce *only* if the mother "actively encourages and facilitates their relationship" (p. 152). Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) offer one significant caveat to Nielsen's (1999) view: rather than inhibiting a father's involvement with his children, a mother's "anger or opposition" to the father can actually "fuel" the father's increased involvement (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980, p. 1534).

Ultimately, the father's relationship with his children is directly affected by his triangulated interactions with the children's mother. Often, the mother holds a degree of power over the father/child relationship and, in some cases, can act as a gatekeeper who controls the father's access to his children (Stone, 2006). This phenomenon of gatekeeping is under-researched and under-explored compared to issues associated with divorce and family interactions (Pruett, Arthur, & Ebling, 2007). However, maternal gatekeeping has a significant impact on the father-child relationship—a relationship that is more connected than the mother-child relationship to the quality of the co-parent relationship.

Gatekeeping is typically manifested in the mother's behavior, for example, in how she facilitates the father's access to his child, how she speaks of the father in the presence of the child, and how she communicates with the father about the child's welfare; these behaviors can "exacerbate child distress in the presence of father involvement [when requiring] separation from the mother" (Pruett, Arthur, & Ebling, 2007, p. 722).

It appears that gatekeeping has its roots in the power dynamics from the marriage itself: 60-80% of mothers do not want husbands more involved in childrearing because it would change the balance of power in the marriage and in how the mothers perceive their roles (Lamb & Oppenheim, 1989). Research posits that the mother's extent of gatekeeping can be determined by how she felt her partner treated her during the marriage, thus possibly exercising control over the father's involvement as a way of expressing this unresolved resentment (Pruett, Arthur, & Ebling, 2007).

While numerous external factors—such as the mother's attitudes towards the father—heavily influence the father's interactions with his children, fathers are also highly affected by internal factors that hinder their involvement with the children. Most notably is the role ambiguity many men experience in the wake of divorce.

Role Ambiguity

Many fathers, especially when nonresidential, often do not know what is socially expected of them as fathers (Arditti, 1995). When married, their identity as a father had been oriented towards being part of a married dyad; after divorce, the men must re-orient themselves and their identities. This redefining of identity takes place over a long period of time, includes a series of transitions inherent in divorce, and is stressful (Hetherington,

1993). Ultimately, the stress from an undefined role identity leads many men to withdraw from their children (Seltzer, 1991).

Pledge (1992) found that couples had the most difficulty adjusting to divorce when the couple had adopted traditional sex roles while married, men experiencing the most stress following the divorce and women at the initial separation. This difference in stress may be explained by the fact that most women retain physical custody of their children, and thus their post-divorce parenting role remains relatively consistent (Arendell, 1995). In contrast, because men often do not live with their children—and they often leave the family’s shared home—their parenting role feels less defined.

The “ambiguity” fathers feel from the actual divorce is furthermore reflected in the responses from their families and the media, and might explain his “sporadic” parental involvement (Seltzer, 1991, p. 80). Were a father’s role to become more clear, his involvement with his children might increase (Stone, 2006). Ultimately, Stone (2006) finds that it “may be difficult for fathers to establish a positive relationship with their child if they do not have a clear sense of how to enact their role” (p. 24).

At the heart of a father’s parenting role lies his male identity. As Baum (2006) noted, following a divorce, a man must separate his identity as a father from that of a husband. This fusion between these two roles was also noted by Ahrons (1980) who found that during a marriage, a man’s identity as a parent and that of a spouse have “no clear boundary” (p. 195). Thus, following a divorce, a man must then create a “new parental identity without the ex-spouse as a main point of reference” (Baum, 2006, p.247).

While role ambiguity—along with the previously examined factors—has limited and inhibited fathers’ involvement with their children, in recent decades there has been an

evolution of gender role identity for men and women which has also encouraged fathers to assume a more active role in parenting. The next section examines these changes in an historical perspective.

Fatherhood and Changing Role Identity: An Historical Overview

At the center of joint custody arrangements between heterosexual couples lies a history of gender roles. As these roles have evolved—and with respect to joint custody, evolved significantly in the last hundred years—so too have the possibilities for new custodial positions for men and women. Prior to the mid-1800s, the courts considered children the property of their father, and custody was awarded solely to him. This pre-Civil War era, one might argue, was a time in which the courts—as a reflection of the greater populace—was less concerned with child welfare than in preserving and upholding a man’s right to property—which included all things and persons who might fall under the wide definition of property. As people became regarded not as property but as individuals with their own rights, this social stance towards children gradually changed, and courts began favoring mothers for sole custody.

With the industrial revolution, the household was no longer central to economic and industrial activities; thus the economic role of women declined, and male and female “spheres of activity became more separated, as did the definitions of men’s and women’s roles” (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, p. 30). Work became defined as occurring outside the home, thus creating the notion that home was a nurturing and female world, replacing the previous masculine and authoritarian environment (Coontz, 1992). Fathers were expected to provide financially while mothers were expected to assume the role of caregiver. This phenomenon was predominantly a middle class one: lower class women

and children still worked in factories, mills, and others' homes as was financially necessary. However, in the early 1900s, a desire to protect children from unsafe working conditions prompted a renewed interest in returning them to the home, thus defining the home as the realm for women and children (Coontz, 1992).

World War I did not create any lasting change in the labor divide; while the Great Depression did see an increase of women in the workforce, these jobs tended to be significantly lower paying than male jobs. As in the first World War, WWII created a shortage of male workers and women filled these jobs, though they were frequently not paid equal wages. Following the war, women were socially encouraged to return to the home—the economy supposedly could not support full employment. At this time in history, families could sustain themselves on one wage, for wages were relatively strong. White, middle class families were encouraged to move to suburbs and buy new homes, and the image of the nuclear family—with the man as breadwinner and woman as homemaker—became the foundation of the dominant culture of white, middle class American life. Fathers' identities were thus rooted in earning money and playing a secondary support to mothers in their role as parent.

The 1950s housewife was increasingly dissatisfied with her role as homemaker; though women were encouraged to remain in the home, they continued to enter and remain in the workforce, especially married women who, following WWII, entered the workforce in increasing numbers (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005). In the 1960s, with the rise of both the feminist and civil rights movements, legal landmarks such as the Equal Pay Act in 1963, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the 1972 Education Amendments Act reduced the more blatant forms of discrimination. The 1970s antidiscrimination and

affirmative action laws requiring that employers give preference to women and minorities also increased women's representation in the workforce (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005). Consequently, women were more able to define themselves not just as homemakers but as wage earners; similarly, men's attitudes began to shift such that their identity was no longer so closely tied to the workplace.

In the late 1970s, mental health professionals questioned whether sole custody was indeed the best choice for children. Within this context of "widespread changes in sex roles," states began adopting presumption laws mandating that unless there were clear grounds in opposition, say, in the case of abuse, parents should be awarded shared legal custody of children (Arditti, 1992a; Maccoby et al., 1993, p. 24; Richards & Goldenberg, 1986). Additionally, both men's and women's movements of the '70s and '80s pushed for fathers to maintain relationships with their children.

In summary, a number of factors have restricted post-divorce father involvement: society's attitudes towards fathers and mothers, the legal system's treatment of fathers, pre- and post-divorce parental conflict, and ambiguous roles for fathers. However, as gender identity roles continue to change, fathers are becoming more active parents. With this in mind, we turn now to a more specific examination of the JLC and JPC literature.

JLC and JPC Literature

An Introduction

The presumption laws did not make additional custodial provisions, and thus the vast majority of joint custody arrangements in the early 1980s resulted in fathers having JLC while the mothers retained sole residential custody (Arditti, 1992a). Consequently, with presumption laws came the parallel presumption that joint custody

equated to joint *legal* custody, not joint *physical* custody. With JLC, men now had the same legal rights and authority as mothers to make important decisions concerning the welfare of their children; however, few men chose to gain JPC in which their children could spend approximately half their time in each parent's household. Most literature in the 1980s and '90s did not focus on or even delineate between JLC and JPC, likely due to the fact that so few men actually chose or pressed for JPC—and only half of those families with JPC retained the dual residential arrangement over time (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992).

It should also be noted that the actual custody arrangements between parents vary significantly among couples, just as one might expect the degree of communication and cooperative parenting might vary greatly. A family with JLC may have custodial arrangements that are more akin to a shared residential arrangement, just as a family with JPC might more closely resemble a JLC custodial arrangement if, for example, the father only sees the child on weekends and thus is not responsible for overseeing the child's daily functions. We must also consider that the quantity of time a parent spends with a child is not necessarily indicative of the quality of that time. Ultimately, it is difficult to measure a father's involvement or degree of closeness with his children based solely on the custodial arrangement.

The Extent of JLC and JPC Research

In the 1980s as most states adopted their own versions of presumption laws, there followed a flurry of research evaluating the effects of this new approach to awarding custody. With the change in law, most research flocked to study the differences between non-custodial arrangements and joint custody—and in this case, joint *legal* custody.

When conducting a simple search for literature through PyschINFO using “joint custody” as the search criteria and restricting the results to English, peer-reviewed literature, 5 studies were found between 1970-1979, 93 between 1980-1989, 53 between 1990-1999, and 39 between 2000-2008. When using “joint legal custody,” 0 were found between 1970-1979, 7 between 1980-1989, 3 between 1990-1999, and 9 between 2000-2008. However, when searching for “joint physical custody,” or “joint residential custody,” 0 studies were found between 1970-1979, 5 between 1980-1989, 5 between 1990-2099, and 4 between 2000-2008.

Keeping in mind that “joint custody” essentially amounted to joint *legal* custody, it is notable that the 1990s produced half the amount of joint legal custody studies than the previous decade. Likewise, this decrease continued into 2000. Interestingly, the number of JPC studies remained constant throughout the decades but at a fraction of the JLC studies. Though this quick search is rough, giving an immediate overview of the general trend, Whiteside and Becker’s (2000) meta-analytical review of prior literature generally corroborates the above figures: of the twelve studies meeting their criteria for the review, only two included dual-resident families in their samples.

As stated previously, it seems relatively consistent that anywhere from 6-12% of divorced men have joint physical custody of their children—and here, it must be acknowledged that JPC has no absolute definition and thus is defined by each study. Following that JPC is not a common occurrence, the research focusing specifically on JPC is naturally not as plentiful as that of JLC or noncustodial arrangements. Those studies that do include JPC largely do so in comparative terms with JLC or noncustodial status rather than as a phenomenon to be studied on its own merits.

While it is widely accepted that post-divorce father involvement generally has a positive impact on children, few studies have focused on the JPC father's unique circumstances. While these fathers may be statistically unusual, according to the Department of Health and Human Services' (2000) website, "from 1988 to 2009, the number of custodial fathers is projected to increase by 33 percent. In contrast, the number of custodial mothers will increase by only 11 percent." One may wonder if, as the total number of joint custodial cases increases, JPC cases might also increase—and subsequently the amount of research devoted to JPC families.

A Methodological Overview of JLC and JPC

The research has focused on a wide range of areas, from joint custody's effect on children, parents, and familial relationships to analyzing the specific factors (i.e. custody type, visitation, child support, parental conflict, etc.) that affect outcomes. Generally, studies did not attempt to find only JPC fathers but instead found divorced men with a range of custodial arrangements. The studies then compared the men in these different arrangements. It is not clear why the studies tended to refrain from examining solely JPC men but it is possible they did this because so few men seem to have JPC arrangements.

The studies followed the trends of the time: in early studies, most men were noncustodial parents. Later, if the men did have joint custody, it was very uncommon that they shared JPC. A large majority of these studies also included a comparison to a maternal, sole custody group. When focusing on fathers, these studies often took the perspective of studying the nonresidential father's involvement in the post-divorce

family. When assessing for child adjustment, a large majority of all the studies did not assess the child's adjustment from the child's vantage, thus coloring the results.

While the JLC research tended to be both qualitative and quantitative, JPC research was largely quantitative and not nearly as extensive as JLC research—most of the JPC studies also originated from two research groups in northern California and thus the research was geographically limited. Generally, both JLC and JPC quantitative studies drew their samples from either large, national surveys or from court records. Studies that used court documents were often limited by the region they chose, though they were able to find a wide range of participants within those regions. While the studies that used national surveys lacked personal accounts which the qualitative studies offered, these studies could present more reliable accounts of the joint custody phenomena by virtue of their random and very large sampling.

Apparently there have been other areas which the literature has generally not explored, such as the relationship between fathers and their children (Stone, 2006); those studies that have done so typically focused on the JLC or non-custodial father as opposed to fathers who have joint physical custody. As noted earlier, the studies that examined the JPC father-child post-divorce relationship have largely been conducted in California, one of the leading states supporting JPC (Pruett & Santangelo, 1999). Additionally, Whiteside and Becker's (2000) meta-analytical review of literature focusing on children under five years old found no data on "fathers' parenting styles, their similarity to mothers' parenting styles, and their relationships with paternal adjustment and coparental variables" (p. 23). Additionally, any measures of father-

child relationship quality were “global and based on self-report or report from the mother” (p. 23).

It should be noted that to examine the phenomenon of father involvement post-breakup and only examine once-legally married couples limits the cultural and socioeconomic diversity of a sample. On its website, the Department of Health and Human Services (2000) reports that “the number of never-married custodial parents increased from 3.1 million in 1988 to 4.9 million in 1998, and is projected to rise to 6.6 million in 2009,” and that “the number of custodial parents that have never been married is projected to increase from 27 percent in 1988 to 39 percent in 2009.” Almost without exception, the literature has studied only legally married couples who have then become divorced. Typically, studies have used legal marriage as an easily defined parameter to shape—but also confine—the study. However, in doing so, these studies limit their scope to participants who culturally or socially subscribe to the institution of marriage.

With regard to racial diversity within a sample, it should be noted that though using public records in a Midwestern state, Bokker, Farley, and Bailey (2006) produced a random sample (N=97) in which 97% of the sample was white. Of these participants, nearly 20% had JPC arrangements. The researchers do not explain these results. Considering that other researchers have also encountered nearly all-white samples with regard to JPC, it remains unclear to what extent JPC is a phenomenon restricted by race. Bokker, Farley, and Bailey’s (2006) sample did seem diverse with respect to class: nearly half of the participants earned between \$25,000 and \$45,000, with the remaining participants evenly divided between earning less than \$25,000 or earning more than \$45,000. Similarly, the education level was reported to be

“relatively low” with 79% having only a high school degree or less which 20% had at least a college degree (p. 91).

Just as JLC and JPC studies shared similarities in their methods, they also shared some common foci as delineated in the next section.

The Content of JLC and JPC Studies

Considering the complexities inherent to family systems, JLC and JPC studies that focused on fathers sought to isolate similar variables to determine both the relationships between these variables and their effects on family members. Listed below are some of these variables that significantly influenced the parent/child relational outcomes following divorce:

- Parent/child relationship quality prior to divorce
- Relationship between parents prior to and following divorce
- Age and gender of child
- Legal system and the degree of conflict pertaining to legal proceedings
- Custodial arrangement
- Socioeconomic position and job status of parents
- Visitation arrangements and the mother’s attitudes towards visitation

With respect to studies that specifically included JPC men, these tended to 1) examine father adjustment (Bokker, Farley, & Bailey, 2006; Cavanaugh, 2007; Richards & Goldenberg, 1986), 2) focus on the father/child relationship (Donnelly & Finkelhor, 1992), and 3) isolate the factors that might determine JPC (Kelly et al., 1995; Seltzer, 1990).

Father Adjustment

With respect to the father adjustment, early JLC studies found that noncustodial fathers had generally higher levels of emotional distress when compared to their custodial

counterparts (Shapiro & Lambert, 1998; Stone, 2002). Similarly, the noncustodial father took longer to adjust to divorce than the custodial father (Kitson, 1992). In fact, the noncustodial father seemed to have the lowest levels of psychological well-being when compared not only to both married and custodial men but to custodial women as well. (Hughes, 1989). It may not seem surprising then that noncustodial fathers are more lonely than custodial fathers (Riessman, 1991). These non-custodial fathers also became quickly disengaged with their children and this disengagement became significant within a year of the separation (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1976).

Like custodial fathers who were better adjusted than their noncustodial counterparts, fathers with JPC tended to show better adjustment than their JLC counterparts. In their quantitative study of 97 recently divorced fathers located through public records, researchers found that fathers with JPC and full custody had “less emotional distress... higher levels of self esteem and lower levels of depression” (Bokker, Farley, & Bailey, 2006, p. 93). However, it should be noted that the researchers were unable to determine a “cause and effect relationship between the emotional well-being of recently divorced fathers and their custodial statuses” (p. 95). Ultimately, the study focused on the factors affecting a father’s levels of stress rather than assessing a father’s positive adjustment for reasons other than a lack of stress. Here too, researchers encounter the challenge of disentangling the many variables of divorced families to arrive at cause and effect conclusions.

Taking a slightly different tack than Bokker, Farley, and Bailey (2006), Cavanaugh (2007) qualitatively studied the JPC father’s adjustment to his role as primary caregiver as it related to his masculine identity. The study found that these men

“identified as parents rather than fathers, and thus saw their role as similar to that of their spouse” (p. 59). Though all raised in so-called “traditional” families, these men did not see themselves as traditional bread-winners; however, many of the men still identified certain aspects of caregiving “such as emotional nurturance and compassion – as ‘feminine’ traits [but this] did not threaten the participants’ sense of masculinity” (p. 86). While some of the fathers reported social acceptance of their role as a primary caregiver, some fathers felt isolated and alienated, and this may have been due to their specific geographical locations.

In 1986, Richards and Goldenberg developed a “preliminary look” at fathers who had joint physical custody. Though Richards and Goldenberg defined their study as “preliminary,” there were three previous studies that looked at JPC arrangements; these studies’ findings were mixed, possibly because, as Richards and Goldenberg argued, they did not control for the age of the child. Instead, Richards and Goldenberg qualitatively examined JPC fathers (N=10) of children under six years old.

Richards and Goldenberg’s research is very similar to the present study, though this current study did not use child age as a selection criteria. Richards and Goldenberg’s results, however, were largely limited by their chosen sample: all ten fathers were white and predominantly middle-class—in Richards and Goldenberg’s defense, it should be noted here that according to the Department of Health and Human Services (2000), white men were far more likely to have custody of their children than other races. Ultimately, the study does not delve into the intricacies or changes within the father/child relationship, the father’s perceptions of himself, or how being a JPC parent has changed him or his children. What’s more, nine of the ten fathers reported they felt the impetus for

divorce came from the mother, that the men had been thrust into the role of JPC because, as they saw it, the “mothers have left the marriage, in part, specifically to escape childrearing responsibilities” (p. 157). These researchers did not explain why they encountered so many men in this unusual circumstance.

Richards and Goldenberg (1986) found that the father’s reactions to JPC were greatly determined by their relationship with their ex-wife: these fathers experience “role overload and household management problems, and continue to feel hostility toward their former wives who have cut back on family responsibilities” (p. 154). Given its natural limitations as determined by the sample, the study was unable to fully explore the father/child relationship because the father’s energy was still focused on his ex-wife.

The Father/Child Relationship

Just as early studies showed that men in joint custody arrangements were better adjusted than noncustodial fathers, early studies revealed that the father/child relationship was directly affected by the custodial arrangement: joint custodial fathers were significantly more involved and had greater contact with their children than noncustodial fathers (Bowman & Ahrons, 1985). Arditto (1992a) also found that after controlling for both the pre-divorce father-child closeness and quantity of interactional time, joint custodial fathers still reported greater contact with their children following the divorce. Donnelly and Finkelhor (1992) used a somewhat different vantage: they surmised that rather than the father/child relationship being determined by custody type, the relationship was more influenced by the degree of conflict between the parents. However, these two views may not be in conflict: as Bauserman (2002) is quick to point out, “parents who have better relationships prior to, or during, the divorce process may self-

select into joint custody, such that quality of parental relationship is confounded with custody status” (p. 99).

Comparing the pre- and post-divorce father/child relationship, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found no direct correlation: fathers who were very close to their children pre-divorce did not necessarily maintain the relationship post-divorce, and some fathers who were distant to the child before the divorce became very close after it. Ultimately, they found that any relationship between the visiting father and the child had “no counterpart in the intact marriage” (p. 1534). Perhaps this research reveals that there are other, more complex factors at play in determining the father/child relationship. However, Wallerstein and Kelly’s (1980) findings were later challenged by Arditti and Keith (1993) and Lowery (1986) who suggested that fathers who were closely involved with their children prior to divorce continued to maintain this involvement post-divorce.

Factors Determining JPC

While studies sought to understand the effects of JPC on family members, some studies attempted to learn more about the conditions that encouraged or fostered this uncommon joint custodial arrangement. In an effort to better define under what conditions JPC occurs, Kelly et al. (2005) found that a father’s attaining higher levels of education improved the chances of JPC arrangements, though conversely, a mother’s attaining these education levels tended to reinforce the tradition of a mother’s receiving sole custody. With respect to income, Kelly et al. (2005) found that parents who had significantly higher incomes than their spouses had an advantage only in attaining sole custody, corroborating Bokker, Farley, and Bailey’s (2006) findings. Seltzer (1990), too, established that when one spouse’s income was missing, the

chance that he or she would receive physical custody was diminished. Kelly et al. (2005) and Seltzer (1990) also agreed that total parental income and JPC were somewhat related in that JPC tended to be a phenomenon of the upper and middle classes. Seltzer (1990) also found that when the mother's income was high, the odds of JPC were increased, likely due to the mother's having a professional career and due to having a marriage in which shared parenting was already the norm.

While Kelly et al. (2005) found that the number and age of children did not influence a family's choosing JPC, Seltzer (1990) found that as the youngest child in the family's age increased, so did the odds that the father might have JPC; however, with regard to determining *maternal* custody type, child age was not a significant factor (Seltzer, 1990).

Ultimately, Kelly et al. (2005) noted that "despite gender neutrality in the law, traditional gender roles appear to persist" in allocating custody to the mother (p. 39). When there was significant conflict between the parents prior to the separation, the mother was often awarded custody of the children.

Summary

While JPC is a relatively rare phenomenon compared to JLC, the incidence of JPC is gaining in popularity. It is commonly accepted that post-divorce father involvement in childrearing leads to positive outcomes in child adjustment, though custodial status does not necessarily determine child adjustment. The many variables of the family system pre- and post-divorce make determining cause and effect relationships all the more challenging. The literature does indicate that factors such as parental conflict, social attitudes towards fathers and mothers, the legal system, and

fathers' gender role identity all affect a father's involvement with his children, and subsequently the father/child relationship following divorce.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This qualitative study examined the effects of joint physical custody (JPC) on fathers and the father/child relationship. The study used a semi-structured, one-hour interview to capture the subjects' specific language through an interactive method. This qualitative approach allowed for a detailed exploration into the nuances of the participants' experiences.

Sample

Selection criteria was limited to fathers eighteen years or older who had a formal or informal joint physical custody arrangement of at least one minor child who generally stayed with each parent at least two nights each week. This arrangement must have been sustained for at least one year. Fathers who regularly did not see their children for more than two months at a time were excluded from the study.

Fathers could be partnered or remarried. Fathers who became partnered within the first six months of their separation from their child's mother were accepted as participants as long as they did not experience any significant change in parenting following the break-up—that is, their new partner did not assume the parenting role of the man's previous partner. All men who became partnered after six months following the break-up were asked to focus specifically on their experiences when they were unpartnered.

Men who had never been married to the mother of their child were acceptable participants; in an effort to be as inclusive as possible, this researcher did not exclude

men who, because of cultural or socioeconomic status, did not marry their child's mother. However, men who did not speak English were excluded from the study. Because this study examined the father's experience from the vantage of male/female gender roles, men who had sole custody of their child and men who had children from a same-sex relationship were excluded from the study.

It was the intent of this researcher to have a heterogeneous sample, specifically with regard to race and culture. The vast majority of past qualitative studies have been limited by racial diversity. To best understand JPC as a general phenomenon, it would be necessary to have a fully representative sample.

Data

Demographic data were collected from each participant. These questions covered biographical information about the father and his family as well as his custodial arrangement. The demographic questions can be found in Appendix C.

The qualitative interview was oriented around a questionnaire consisting of five sections outlining the joint custody arrangement, the relationship with the father's ex-spouse, the father/child relationship prior to the divorce, the father/child relationship following the divorce, and gender roles. The *Interview Questions* can be found in Appendix C.

Data Collection

The Human Subjects Review Board of the Smith College School for Social Work approved this thesis study (see Appendix A). The design process started with recruitment letters detailing the study's purpose and inclusion criteria. These letters were posted at local family centers, physicians' offices, and agencies devoted specifically to supporting

men. Individuals who worked with families of color were also contacted and given recruitment information.

When an interested participant contacted the researcher, he was prescreened by phone to verify eligibility, and then sent an informed consent form (see Appendix B). After agreeing to participate and signing the informed consent, the subject was interviewed using a semi-structured interview technique. The data were collected with a digital recorder and then transcribed by the researcher.

About half of the participants were located through word of mouth sampling. They tended to be located within one northeastern state where the study was being conducted. However, at least three men were recruited through a regional fatherhood advocacy group that was active in the father rights movement. A few fathers were located through snowball sampling.

The researcher was contacted by twenty-four men. Four men were excluded due to insufficient time spent with their child, two men were excluded due to having sole physical custody, four men did not confirm an interview time or return calls, one father missed the scheduled appointment and could not be further contacted, and two men were known to the researcher. No participant was excluded due to race, ethnicity, or religion. In the end, eleven fathers with JPC were interviewed. Interviews were conducted at two general locations: either the father's home or business or at a public meeting room.

As noted above, it was the researcher's hope to gather a racially diverse sample. In the end, of the eleven men interviewed, only one identified as a person of color. Of the twenty-four men who contacted the researcher, only two men were likely persons of color, as identified by a social worker who knew them. One of these men did not meet

participation criteria and the other did not return calls. In an effort to find more men of color, the researcher attempted to locate divorced men through court records at a district with a large percentage of people of color. He was informed by a desk clerk that for the five years she'd reviewed divorce settlements, she'd only seen one JPC settlement.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, the responses were coded by subject matter, such as attitudes towards custody, relationship with the child, conflict with the mother, attitude towards mother's parenting, etc. The researcher initially looked for results that confirmed or varied from previous research. The researcher then examined the data inductively to look for additional patterns and themes that arose from the data. Spreadsheets based on the data were also used to help determine these overarching patterns between significant variables. The transcripts were read numerous times to compile quotable material.

Biases

This researcher was drawn to studying JPC fathers based on the opinion that men should play an equal and integral role in parenting children. This bias likely lent an air of approval towards the participants, especially ones who had equal, 50-50 custodial splits. This bias may have also allowed the interviewer to be more empathetic when fathers described discrimination by the legal system or societal marginalization, though he attempted to make every effort to remain neutral and non-emotive during the interview.

In addition to his feeling of support for these men, the researcher also held a strong feminist leaning, a bias that was felt when some men expressed very strong

resentment and bitterness towards their ex-wives or women in general. While this researcher attempted to remain neutral, his awareness that the fathers were expressing their own highly biased rendition of events could have been detected by the participants and thus colored their responses.

Ethics and Safeguards

As dictated by federal regulations, all notes, interviews, transcripts, and digital recordings will be kept in a secure location for three years following the completion of the study. The participants in this study were informed of their rights of participation and that all personal information gathered in the study will be appropriately disguised in the final write up. The participants were informed of the risks of participating—that they may experience painful emotions during the interview. To that end, each participant was given a resource list containing local agencies providing mental health services. The participants were also informed of the benefits of participating in the study: they may benefit from voicing their thoughts, feelings, or experiences about JPC, or they may feel a renewed appreciation of their own struggles and successes.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This qualitative study aimed to better understand how joint physical custody (JPC) affects fathers and the father/child relationship. Specifically, how does the post-divorce family system, altered and defined by JPC, influence the father's adjustment to the divorce and his subsequent relationship to his children?

Demographics

The average age of the participants was 49.6 years, ranging from 44 to 61. The median age was 47. All but one father identified as Caucasian, with one father identifying as Hispanic. All but one father held a college degree with 9 of the 11 men holding a Master's or higher degree. The men all had at least one adolescent at the time of the study. Six of the men had two or more children; of these, three had two sons whereas the other three fathers had at least one son and one daughter. Five fathers had only one child and all five of these men had daughters. All the men had been married to their children's mother, and on average, the time since the divorce was 7.5 years with a range of 2 to 17 years and a median of 9 years. Two of the 11 men were remarried, with an additional man in a long-term relationship; the other 8 men all reported as being "single" or "dating." All eleven men reported having and wanting close relationships with their children, and all the fathers described themselves as being very pro-active in first acquiring and then maintaining this relationship. Six of the 11 men had a 50-50 split of physical custodial time while the remaining 5 men hosted their children either 4 or 5 nights per two-week period; all five of these men reported wanting increased time with their children. Expressed as a percent of custodial time (as compared to the mother's

custodial time), the fathers' average custodial time was 41.8 percent. Fathers lived an average of 5.3 miles from the mother's residence, with a range of 0 to 12 miles and a median of 5 miles.

Major Findings

In assessing the effects of JPC on the men and the father/child relationship, a dominant theme emerged: the men's past and current relationship with their ex-spouse significantly affected them and their relationships with their children. While similar in their commitment to their children, the men had varying experiences and relationships with their ex-wives. The major findings listed below will be presented first as they relate to the father/child relationship and the father's perceptions of JPC, followed by the fathers' relationship to the ex-spouse or his environment, such as the judicial system or society in general.

The findings are divided into two sections: the anticipated findings and the unexpected findings. When participants reported data that were expected based on previous literature, these data were categorized as anticipated data. Similarly, when participants reported data that were not confirmed by previous research, these responses were categorized as unexpected findings.

Anticipated findings:

1. The fathers reported having a closer, more intimate relationship with their children as a result of JPC and the mother's absence. The fathers also reported feeling relieved that their former spouse no longer watched over and was critical of the father's parenting choices.

2. The men unanimously recommended JPC.
3. The men acquired JPC because they either strongly wanted JPC or their wives were not interested in having full physical custody of the children.
4. A large majority of men rated the mother's parenting skills between fair and poor. Approximately half of these men felt the mother's parenting style greatly differed from their own; the other half of the men believed the mother suffered from mental instability or was not interested in being a fully involved parent.
5. Many of the fathers felt that the judicial system actively discriminated against them. They uniformly felt child support payments were unfair and that the courts were not predisposed towards an equal JPC arrangement.

Unexpected findings:

1. Some men were able to rationalize or minimize their dissatisfaction either with the mother's parenting or the custodial arrangement such that their child seemed to benefit from the supposed problem.
2. No pattern was perceived between the amount of the father's physical custodial time and the father's anger at the judicial system, the father/mother post-divorce relationship, or the level of communication between father and mother.
3. The men showed a significant and sustained intensity of resentment towards their ex-spouse and the judicial system.

4. Despite a notable degree of conflict between nearly all the fathers and their ex-spouses, except for one participant, the fathers did not report any significant gatekeeping behavior by the mothers.
5. Many of the fathers who were critical of the mother's parenting believed she would rate their parenting skills higher than they had rated hers.
6. Despite having non-traditional gender roles as JPC fathers, these fathers still viewed gender roles in traditional manners.
7. Regarding their role as a single father, some men felt discriminated against and perceived as an outsider whereas some men did not feel out of place. This reaction was largely determined by the immediate community in which the men lived.

On the following page is a table summarizing the key responses of the participants. The table has been ordered by *Father's attitude towards mother*, from most approving to most critical.

Table 1: Participant Key Responses

Father's attitude towards mother	Father's % of JPC time	Degree of conflict at breakup	Anger at legal system	Current relationship with mother	Current communication level with mother	Father's opinion of mother's parenting	Mother's opinion of father's parenting
approving	50	civil	none	good	very good	excellent	excellent
accepting	50	civil	none	functional	good	good	good
somewhat critical	50	civil	none	functional	functional	fair-poor	good
critical	50	heavy	large	conflictual	minimal	fair-poor	fair
critical	50	civil	some	functional	functional	fair	good
critical	36	some	none	functional	pretty good	fair	pretty good
very critical	50	heavy	large	conflictual	minimal	fair-poor	fair
very critical	29	some	large	conflictual	minimal	poor	poor
very critical	36	some	none	conflictual	minimal	fair-poor	fair-poor
very critical	30	some	large	very conflictual	functional	poor	poor
very critical	29	heavy	large	very conflictual	minimal	poor	fair

Anticipated Findings

The Mother's Absence

When asked about their relationship to their child, fathers often placed this relationship in context to their continuing relationship with their ex-spouse. Generally, the fathers found that with the mother's absence, they were able to form closer relationships with their children. The fathers also remarked that in the mother's absence, they felt relieved as parents. This section will be divided into two sub-sections, the first

describing the father/child relationship as affected by JPC, and the second describing how fathers felt relieved to parent without the critical oversight of a mother.

The Father/Child Relationship

When asked how JPC affected their relationship to their child, the fathers uniformly responded that they felt more involved with their child, especially due to managing the child's day-to-day functioning, from making them breakfast to overseeing the completion of homework. The fathers described themselves as responsible for all aspects of parenting rather than having a co-parent to share or divide these responsibilities. The fathers took clear pride in their parenting abilities, with a number of fathers expressing a kind of triumph at their success: "I became a master father... I became the expert at everything," one father said.

The fathers also reported that they felt considerably closer to their child due to the mother's absence. Some fathers specified that they could now turn their complete attention to their child and this created a more intimate relationship: "there was a distraction there when married. The negotiations with her mother made it difficult to be fully present with my kid." Other men found the relationship with their children was simplified with the mother's absence:

In a sense there's just two of us in the relationship rather than three, meaning their mom. It's simpler. So it's not even that what the mom did was difficult or challenging, it's just that two people are easier—you can come to an understanding about what's going to happen easier than with three people.

For many fathers, in the wake of the mother's absence, they were able to create the relationship with their child on their own terms rather than as influenced, managed, or even dictated by the mother. For example, one father reported how he moved a work

bench to his living room for his children to use: “This is a male house, we can put the work bench somewhere warm rather than a freezing cold basement [where it had been during the marriage].” Another father noted he felt more “relaxed” parenting in the mother’s absence: “I can do things my way rather than have something thrown at me to throw me off kilter.” Another father explicitly credited the divorce and the mother’s absence as helping him define his relationship to his daughter:

The divorce and the amount of time I got to spend with her at all stages of her development made for a tremendously richer father/daughter experience than if the marriage had continued. Because if the marriage had continued, the roles would have continued, and I would have continued to defer to the mother, and the mother would have continued to make the critical decisions, and the arc of the relationship would have been defined by the mother... It allowed me to have the relationship with my child I couldn’t never have dreamed of, and it’s because of the divorce.

Relief at the Mother’s Absence

The men generally reported feeling a measure of relief following their divorce specifically as it related to single parenting: their child’s mother no longer was overseeing their parenting. This attitude can be noted in the previous page’s citation in which the father describes how a two-person relationship is “simpler” than a three-person relationship. Similarly, another father said, “I’m more relaxed. I’m not as likely to be second-guessed about what I’m deciding. I don’t have my ex hovering and thinking that’s not a wise decision. I can just call the shots.”

One father who had had moderate conflict with his ex-spouse stated that after the divorce, he and his daughter had become closer following the mother’s absence:

I think all the background noise of the conflict with her mom was gone. I had a lot more energy because it wasn’t dissipated in the struggle with her mother. I didn’t have to negotiate with her mother, and I could focus on my daughter.

A large number of the fathers reported that they felt more comfortable and confident in their parenting abilities following the divorce because their child's mother was not a critical presence in their relationship with their child. "Anything she disagreed with, she wouldn't tolerate it," one father said. "If she disagreed, if she thought I didn't know what I was doing, she'd really interfere."

Attitudes Towards JPC

The fathers unanimously endorsed JPC. One father remarked that men "shoot themselves in the head" if they do not press to get some custody of their kid. Many men expressed considerable misgivings that other men were not able to enjoy physical custody: "It's deeply upsetting [that] many dads experience [custodial arrangements of] one day a week and every other weekend."

The fathers were very conscious of the uniqueness of their JPC arrangement, and a number of them commented about the difficulties in attaining JPC:

I run into [single moms] who tell me [their ex-husband] took off and he's gone, and it pisses me off because there's so many men out there who want the [joint custodial] position, and guys like that screw it up.

A few men commented that they not only thought men should have physical custody, but that the custody should be shared with mothers:

There is a sense that kids, when they're a certain age, can say which parent they'd like to be with. I really think that's wrong. There should be no question that the kid is half time with each parent, pretty much until they're 16 or 17.

Another father similarly commented, "I think it's good for kids to have a relationship with their mothers too. This whole idea of one parent wins and the other loses...is just ludicrous."

One father who was particularly critical of his ex-spouse said, “I felt that [my kids] were better off having [their mother] in their life than not at all.” He went on to say that:

I could have a full relationship with my kids, but I wouldn't have a full relationship if I were seeing them two weekends a month. I wouldn't even be parenting them. Now I can parent them. They come home, I drag them through homework and all that stuff, and they get dragged to the store and all that stuff that ordinary kids go through, but if you have an entertainment-director dad, then you don't have that role.

Another father commented:

I believe that when parents split the post-divorce relationship up equally or as equally as they can, then a lot of those issues about child support fade away. There's a lot more room for professional development when there's joint custody. There's more room for social life. I'm a big proponent of the model for people who are motivated and have the capacity for it which is a lot wider than people realize.

Why the Men Chose JPC

Four of the eleven men reported having a civil divorce, four reported having some conflict—and these men described this amount of conflict as “normal”—and three men described their divorce as significantly adversarial. It appears that the degree of conflict at the time of divorce did not necessarily influence these fathers' attaining JPC; however, there may be a connection between civil divorces and the attainment of a 50-50 custodial split: the four men who reported civil break-ups all attained 50-50 splits. The converse may not hold, however: of the six fathers with 50-50 splits, four had civil divorces and two had heavily adversarial divorces.

Three participants were able to achieve a JPC arrangement because they and the mothers wanted this. In these cases, the couple had already been sharing the childcare prior to the breakup, and they used JPC to continue this division of parenting.

One father commented that he and his wife “had an excellent structure worked out in how we’d deal with the kids on a daily basis, and we decided to work as hard as we could to keep that going.” Another father captured this sense of mutual decision making:

We mutually had an understanding that we both loved our kids dearly, and that the other person loved our kids dearly, and there was never a thought in our minds other than shared 50-50. Neither one of us wanted to give the other more time, but neither was willing to take or ask for more time. It’s what seemed right.

Though not describing this mutuality with their ex-partners, three men explained their attaining JPC as a result of their strong desire to be involved with their children. For example, one father remarked, “It was very important to me. No matter what happened, I was not going to drop out of my kid’s life. I was going to be an involved father, and I made that a top priority ever since the split.”

Only one father reported that while wanting an equal split—his wife had opposed this—his work prevented his taking on a full 50-50 split. Four other fathers received JPC either because the mother’s mental health prevented her from full-time parenting or because the mother was not interested in having full physical custody.

The Mother’s Parenting Ability

Of the eleven men in this study, nine rated their ex-spouse’s parenting abilities as fair or worse. This section is divided into three sub-sections based on the fathers’ perceptions of the mother’s style of parenting: three of these fathers felt the mother was too constrictive or rigid in her parenting, one father believed that the mother was too loose or permissive, and the other five fathers felt that the mother was not able to be fully functional or present as a parent.

Mothers Who Were Perceived as Constrictive

Fathers who felt the mothers were too constrictive described their parenting as “over-involved” or “controlling.” Fathers described various instances where a mother strongly disapproved of a father’s parenting choices, especially when the father took risks in the outdoors which he felt were responsible. One mother vehemently protested when a father took his children on a strenuous hike. Another mother protested when the father transported their daughter in conditions she believed as dangerous.

One father described how the mother was unable to be separate from her child.

She did not like giving up [my son] for a block of time. It was absolutely not working for her not having him for the block of five nights, even though she had him the other nine nights. She was very clear this was not working for her...She was coming up with a scheme so that I wouldn’t have my block with [my son], and I just said, ‘no I wouldn’t do it.’ There was a clause in the divorce agreement—she knew that she would have trouble giving up [my son] for a block—so she had written in to our agreement that she was entitled during my time with [my son], during my five-day block, she was entitled up to four hours with [him]. During the divorce and negotiations, she would accept my proposal if I would let her have that four-hour time. And I did.

Another father who considered the mother inflexible remarked, “She’s an infuriating person; she won’t think outside of the box,” When describing his daughter’s experience with her mother, another father remarked, “[My daughter] feels like she’s incarcerated there [at her mother’s house], and she feels like she has freedom here.”

Mothers Who Were Perceived as Too Permissive

The one father who believed his ex-spouse was too lax reported:

If the kids fall down on a certain [school] subject, I raise the issue. [I told her] I was very concerned about their grades dropping significantly, and I asked her to talk to them about it, and she said, “When I get around to it.” And to this day, she has never once discussed the grades, to my knowledge, to the children.

While this father describes the mother as too slack, he also acknowledges that the mother “calls me the warden to the kids, and my home is the prison.”

Mothers Who Were Perceived as Inattentive or Less Than Functional

Some men were explicit about the origins of the mother’s inattention—one mother suffered from alcoholism, another from bipolar disorder. One father only alluded to the mother’s compromised parenting:

She had some things going on that limited her ability to effectively parent. So I felt it best for the kids’ sake having a much larger role, not necessarily because I wanted a larger role, but because relative to them spending time with their mother, it was much better.

Another father described the mother’s disconnection with her child as stemming from mental health issues: “I think she suffered from post-partum depression after the second girl and I think that became a bigger issue; I found myself taking on more and more the responsibility for raising the kids.”

Other fathers described the mother’s general lack of interest in parenting:

The mother did not want all the time with the child. The mother wanted me to feel the bite of frustration of a melting down two-year old, as if this would be some kind of burden sharing. My god, parenting is for he who gives himself the task. So she thought she was being mean to me by forcing all this time with our daughter, but it obviously worked for her, because she liked having her own time too. So it worked out, but ironically.

One father felt the mother’s prioritizing work caused her to become disengaged with his daughter:

She’s been very concerned about a career, and the parenting stuff has somewhat taken a back seat to that in terms of priorities. I think that the phrase ‘quality time’ is bullshit for the euphemism for the littlest amount of time you can squeeze in.

Instead of spending time with her mother, this father’s daughter was often “dropped off at some after-school activity or at her grandparent’s.” Another father reported that the mom

“has no clue about what’s going on in her daughter’s life because her daughter’s scared of her.”

Of these five fathers, three reported that the mother was passive or “deferred” to them regarding parenting issues:

The challenge is trying to get her to be not just saying what I’m saying but participating in a process that develops what our parenting position is, and this is the passive aspect to it. She really is not very active in that process, and I’m not terribly comfortable with what becomes leading the parenting process. It’s not really a co-led process in that regard.

This same father recognized that due to the JPC, the mother has had to take on more parenting responsibilities:

There were times [before the divorce], she was—it’s kind of too strong to say she was checked out—but whatever. In the morning and the evening, I was pretty much carrying the ball, largely for days on end. But now they’re going to her house, and she has to provide dinner and do some dishes and wash some clothes and talk to their friends’ mom about having kids come over.

Another father described the mother as unable to adequately parent: “I’d like to have complete custody because I don’t think [the mother] has the tools to be a consistent parent. That’s the way it’s been when we were together and it’s certainly been the way since we’ve been apart.”

Discrimination by the Courts

Five of the eleven men considered the mother’s parenting skills as poor; these fathers also tended to be highly critical of the mother in general. Only these five men felt angry at a court system that they perceived as discriminatory. These men felt the legal system was unpredictable, capricious, penalizing, and prejudiced.

One father had very strong feelings about the judges themselves:

These judges are beyond all reason. Systematically, these judges would award my ex-wife sole legal, sole physical, and she didn't even ask for it. They ordered her child support—she didn't even ask for it—and they awarded it based on imputed income because I worked in the trades and assumed I worked in cash under the table. So they imposed a punishing child support. Those people—there's a special place in hell for those probate court judges: it's right next to the catamites, the child molesters. Those people have so much to answer for.

Similarly, another father reported mistreatment by a judge:

[When ruling on my custody] the judge just decided that because I was the primary caretaker, I didn't have experience taking care of [my child] *and* working outside of the home which I'd have to do now, so [my daughter] would be better off living with her mother. In another words, I didn't get the custody because I was the primary caretaker. That's the court system. It was grotesquely unfair. At one point, [my ex-wife] was arrested for trying to bash my head in. I got a restraining order [filed against me]—I'm male, that's how the court system works even though I hadn't actually done anything... The court system is a complete farce.

This same father related another experience in which he felt discriminated against as a father when, at one point, he did not yet have JPC:

There was a [state] law not too long ago where in order to see your child's school records, if you were a non-custodial parent, you had to first apply to the school to let them know, and give them a copy of your divorce decree which specifically said you have the right to see your kids' school records, and then you had to give them 30 days while they contacted the custodial parent to give them an option to get a restraining order against you, and then after 30 days, you could see your kid's report card. And you had to do this every year. That was the state law. You're assumed to be a bad guy.

Some fathers felt that generally, the court system was confusing, "unpredictable," or inscrutable:

You're dealing with an unpredictable system. You'd walk into court, and walk out with things you wouldn't predict. She'd do things that—[I'd think,] "how the hell'd she get away with that?"—whereas they'd beat the hell out of me for that. It was a very unpleasant experience.

Additionally, many fathers often were upset by what they perceived to be unfair child support payments: "There were certainly things that galled me, like having to pay

child support when I didn't have a job and she did. And I had my daughter half the time. That was galling.”

Unexpected Findings

Use of Rationalization, Justification, and Minimization

Many of the participants were critical of the mother's parenting, but these men recognized that they could not control the mother's parenting choices. As a result, these fathers seemed to rationalize that which they disliked, thus making their dislikes more palatable. For instance, while many men regretted having their children's time split between parents, they frequently justified this split as helping the children acclimate to change and different environments. “They come to my house,” one father said, “and they feel comfortable with my house. They know the rules. They've settled in to the way things work which is different than the way they work at [their mother's] house.”

The children learned to navigate two, different worlds, as another father relates: “There are certain things that they deal with with me that they don't deal with when they're with their mom.” As a result, the children become better at seeing the two parents “as distinct and separate people,” and thus become more adept at getting their needs fulfilled in two “distinct” worlds.

One father, after voicing numerous criticisms of the mother, seemed to then justify or minimize his criticisms by perceiving parental differences as a potential learning tool for his children:

I always thought [the mother and I] were on the same page in that it didn't matter which one [of us] was around them. But now I'm discovering that we're really not on the same page. They're really just getting a different experience.

Fathers frequently spoke about the “adaptability” or “resilience” of their children, referring to these traits in a positive light. When asked how being divided between two houses has impacted his children, one father responded:

I don't think it has a lot of impact. Kids get pretty easily accustomed to, *You want a yes, you ask that parent, you want a dollar, ask that parent.* They seem to be able to get through it without a lot of struggle or pain as long as there isn't real contradictions. That people are different is something kids can get through pretty easily.

While some fathers explained the impact of the children's split time between a mother and father, one participant explained how he came to accept and endorse the reduced amount of physical custody which he'd initially wanted:

It was pretty clear early on, I was really determined that it would be 50-50 [split], and my ex was really clear that no way was that going to happen. She saw herself as the primary, and given my schedule, it'd be harder to do 50-50. I was strongly influenced by a psychologist friend of mine who works a lot with families, and his point was that 50-50 was not necessarily in the best interest of the child, that it's important to have a primary parent to push off of, that typically being the mother in that role, typically, but not always, and it may not serve [my child] best to be in a 50-50 anyway. So that sort of fit nicely with my ex's ideas, because she was going to make it hard for [a 50-50 split] to happen.

Amount of JPC Time as a Determinant

As illustrated in Table 1, there was little connection between the amount of the father's physical custodial time and the father's anger at the judicial system, the father/mother post-divorce relationship, or the level of communication between father and mother.

Of the six men who had equal JPC (a 50-50 split), half had no anger at the judicial system and half had some to large amounts of anger at the courts. Of the five men who had less than 50% JPC time with their children, two had no anger at the courts whereas three reported feeling large amounts of anger.

Of the six men with equal JPC time, two reported a conflictual relationship with the mother, three reported functional relationships, and one reported a good relationship. Of the remaining five men with less than 50% JPC time, only one father reported a functional relationship whereas the remaining four men reported a conflictual or very conflictual relationship.

Of the six men with equal JPC time, two reported good or very good communication with the mother, two reported functional communication, and two reported minimal communication. Of the remaining five men with less than 50% JPC time, one reported pretty good communication with the mother, one reported functional communication, and three reported minimal communication.

The father's current relationship with the mother did correlate with parental communication levels. All five fathers with functional or good relationships with the mother reported at least functional communication levels. Similarly, of the six fathers reporting a conflictual or very conflictual relationship with the mother, five had minimal communication with the mother.

It would be helpful to understand how parental communication post-divorce is related to the parents' opinions of each other's parenting abilities; in this study, no causal relationship was determined or examined.

Intensity of Paternal Resentment Towards the Mother and Courts

While many men experience anger and resentment at their ex-spouses and the courts, a number of men in this study showed a sustained and intense resentment towards these two entities. This section is divided according to these two sub-categories.

Resentment Towards the Mother

Only one of the eleven fathers described his relationship with his ex-wife as friendly; the other ten men characterized the relationship with their ex-spouses as either “antagonistic” or, at best, functional: “I talk to her only when I have to. It’s not like we particularly enjoy it. We can sit down and discuss what’s going on with our daughter. It’s very business like.”

Of the six men whose relationship with their ex-spouse was characterized as conflictual or highly conflictual, the average time elapsed since divorce was over nine years, with a range between three and seventeen years, the median number of years being ten. Despite the time elapsed since the divorce, these men still retained an intensity of resentment towards the mother. When asked how he currently gets along with his ex-wife, one father remarked:

It depends a lot on—over these last six to nine months, it’s going quite well, and she’s saying how wonderful we’re getting along, but she’s not picking fights at every turn, and when a spat starts, she walks away from it sometimes, rather than me walking away every time.

Frequently, when asked how he “gets along now” with his ex-spouse, a father will often comment that he has little contact with the mother, and he will then voice his criticisms of her parenting:

We practice something I call “parallel parenting.” There’s very little crossover except basic communications. If I come with an idea, she’s opposed to it generically. [He pauses for a moment, then continues] I go to all my son’s football games. She rarely goes to the games, but she came to one recently, and we talked for a little bit about her work, just a few sentences, and I think that was the first time we’d spoken in at least a month, maybe two months, and I’m talking about even having spoken. Essentially, the kids do all the talking.

Another father described his relationship to his ex-wife in this way:

We get along at a real distance. Her lifestyle that she's chosen for herself is so foreign to any behavior I'd agree with, but as long as we're talking about the kids, I'm okay with that. But she has a twenty-six year-old boyfriend and she's forty, and he's around the kids with some frequency. It's kind of like a train wreck.

Another man voiced his resentment towards women in general: "You hear the feminist complaints that the women get stuck at home while the men get to go out to work: that's such complete bullshit. I'd much prefer to stay home with the kids, of course."

Among many of the men there emerged a common theme of disgruntled acceptance that they could not control the mother's parenting. "What goes on at her house, I can't do anything about. So what can you do? But she can't control what happens here," one father remarked. Another father said, "I may not agree with what she does [at her house], but it's all separate now. I know it, and the kids know it." Generally, men who voiced acceptance towards the mother's parenting had a more functional relationship with the mother.

Resentment Towards the Courts

Some men voiced an intense anger at the judges and the judicial system. As noted earlier, one man felt that judges deserved a "special place in hell...next to the...child molesters." One father described the judges as "accountable to no one." Another father remarked:

How many problems in our country are caused by fatherlessness? The fact that the courts and state are actively deleting kids from their father's lives is horrendous. Take the black community. Something like 80% of kids grow up without their father, at least in the cities. And if you look in jail, that's where you find fatherless kids eventually. Almost all of social problems correlate to fatherlessness than they do to income or race or any other factor.

The fathers uniformly did not oppose paying child support, but felt that the legal system was unfair in its meting out child support payments. One father remarked:

Being able to pay for college [is something] I'd like to do, just supporting my child. I love supporting my child. I'm all for supporting children. It is a joy and pleasure but there is no joy or pleasure that comes from the state taking money from you and giving it to someone else who may or may not do something with it.

A number of fathers found, however, that what they believed to be unfair and too substantial a child support payment was often considered not just fair but relatively small compared to what is normally paid. In response, these fathers often expressed bewilderment and frustration at the system:

I have a divorce agreement, and there's all kinds of money and commitments for a long amount of time and whatnot, and she still thinks it's not enough, and threatens this and that and lawyers, and it seems to be obviously extremely fair to her, of course. But I go and talk with a third party, an unbiased attorney. He says, "You have a good deal, if you went to court, you'd likely [have to pay more]," and I'm like, "You got to be kidding me, how is that even conceivable?" Well, that's because there's this massive bias in the court system for the mom, for XYZ reasons, so be happy with the deal, keep paying the checks for the next sixteen years.

The Absence of Gatekeeping

Nearly all the fathers were critical of their ex-spouse, especially with regard to her parenting skills. Despite this, only one father reported any active gatekeeping behavior by the mother—it should be noted that this study has defined post-divorce gatekeeping as a parent's interfering with or hindering an ex-partner's relationship with his/her child.

One father reported that the mother actively interfered with his relationship with his children *while* married and that "one of the reasons I separated from her is that she really started to get between me and my kids." This father experienced the mother as significantly critical of his parenting decisions, and in this way she often limited his interactions with his children. Following the divorce, she had a significantly reduced

effect on this father: “In the past she would have easily criticized 25% of [everything I did], but now she’s not around to do so, or I just turn a deaf ear.”

The fathers reported that JPC allowed them space to parent independently from the mother’s intrusions or oversight. One father remarked that “I have no power over [my daughter] when she’s at her mother’s house, but [her mother] really doesn’t have much power over me when I’m at my house.” Similarly another father reported that his ex-spouse tried to control his parenting following the divorce but he resisted this:

The mother also wanted both of us to have the same rules at each household. She always tried to control the context of the parental relationship even after the divorce by saying that it was good to have the same rules. Well, you know, I don’t agree. You want to have those kinds of rule at your house, fine. I don’t want to have that rule in my house.

In the end, this father was able to agree upon “sensible limits” with his ex-wife, but like the other fathers in this study, he reported that he was able to limit the mother’s influence on his relationship with his children.

Perceived Parenting Abilities

As illustrated in Table 1 above, six of the nine fathers who were critical of the mother’s parenting believed she would rate their parenting skills higher than they had rated hers. Of the five men who were most generally critical of the mother, only two of these men reported different ratings pertaining to father/mother parenting abilities.

Eight of the eleven fathers were either critical or highly critical of their ex-spouse. The fathers differed in what they criticized: some felt their children’s mother was too passive, disinterested, or disorganized while others felt the mother was too possessive or controlling. Of the eleven men, only two rated the mother’s parenting as good or better; of the remaining nine men, two rated the mother’s parenting as fair, four as fair-poor, and

three as poor. It should also be noted that the three fathers who described the mother's parenting as poor had the least amount of JPC time.

Gender Roles

All the men in this study were very conscious of their non-traditional role as a primary parent following their divorce. Many of these men experienced the public's unease and, at times, active exclusion by other parents. Despite this, all the fathers embraced their non-traditional role. However, when asked what qualities children should generally imagine when they think of fathers and mothers, the men tended to list traditional roles for fathers and mothers. This section is divided into two sub-categories detailing how men were aware of their non-traditional role and how many men imagined children should conceive of fathers and mothers in traditional roles.

Awareness of Non-Traditional Role

All the fathers in this study were very aware of their non-traditional gender roles as JPC fathers. Many of the fathers described instances in which the public had difficulty fitting them into traditional masculine roles. One father remarked that "someone once called me Mr. Mom, and I said, 'No, I'm Mr. Dad.'" Another father commented:

You're a minority [as a JPC father]. When you walk into a room with like nine moms, it's a feeling that even if you want to be there, you feel like there's some eyes on you, unless you have no insecurities whatsoever.

Another father commented that not only did he feel like a minority, he also felt excluded:

It is a challenge to be included in the networks of what tend to be moms. In the elementary school, it tends to be an issue. But in terms of being included, more informal social networks, chatting, play dates, it's harder to be more routinely included.

While many men felt self-conscious and excluded among mothers, one father described how other men perceived him doing something wrong by being a primary parent:

I had some male friends who told me I was doing something wrong initially [by having joint physical custody], but these were all status, career-tracked people. They thought that challenging a woman's—the idea that they [women] were a primary person—this whole idea that fathers usually fold into every other weekend and mothers are usually called the residential or custodial parent...some people just seem like I shouldn't have interfered with that because it's like a [woman's] natural right.

Though many of the fathers described initial surprise and occasionally a sense of discomfort when taking on the primary parent role following divorce, they describe a sense of joy and accomplishment when they realize they can parent without their ex-wife's presence. One father described the transition into being a single, primary father with this metaphor: “It took me down to the end of the dock, threw me in, and I realized I could swim!” Another father described a sense of thrill and accomplishment being a single father for his daughter:

It was some of the best moments of my life, walking down the street with six seven-year olds, most of them girls, or delivering pizza to the library—they weren't difficult jobs, they're just something the male gender has been missing out on for a long time because they were providing [by working at a job]. They had a different role. It felt like I was pioneering, like I was evolving. I didn't feel like I had a lot of friends doing the same thing. But it felt natural, though it felt a bit different because there wasn't a lot of people doing the same thing.

Another father experienced this sense of parental independence and accomplishment not while he was married but while his wife was gone for an extended absence:

The amazing experience for me [was] when she left for Russia for a year—for a week—and I essentially took care of the younger [child] for a week, and I realized all the mistakes I made. Everything went fine and I was like, ‘See, I can do this!’

Endorsing of Traditional Gender Roles

When asked what three traits or qualities a child should ascribe to mothers and fathers, four of the eleven fathers said that the qualities should be the same for both parents. The other seven participants who listed differing characteristics, however, tended to use traditional, genderized descriptors. The table below lists the various traits ascribed to fathers and mothers and the number of participants who generated those descriptors.

Table 2: Traits Ascribed to Parents

Trait	Qualities of a father	Qualities of a mother
Loving	6	6
Unconditionally loving	0	3
Nurturing, comforting	0	2
Provide safety	3	0
Keep the family afloat, manage the family	2	0
Provide morals, be a role model	3	0
Responsible, dependable, reliable, consistent	4	3
Available, attentive	4	3
Accepting	3	4
Fun, playful	4	1

Just over half of the men ascribed both mothers and fathers with having a “loving” presence; however, three additional men differentiated the father’s “loving” presence from the mother’s, specifying that the mother provides an “unconditional” love:

Unconditional love must be there with the mother. The mother can be better than a father, give the child a sense of total belonging: you truly belong here, inherently so. In the eyes of a mother, there is nothing that needs to be proven, but the father says, “When you go out there, you need to prove yourself or you’ll be unsafe.” The mother has her own message that intrinsically you belong.

Two additional participants ascribed the mother with a “nurturing” or “comforting” presence, traits that were not given to fathers. After ascribing the father with being “responsible, available, and fair,” one of these participants recognized his own gender bias, remarking, “I’m trying to give the same [descriptors] to the mother as the father, but I too have this bias that [the descriptors] should be nurturing and loving and available.”

As detailed in the table above, many of the participants attributed fathers with stereotypical male traits such as keeping the family safe, managing the family, and providing for morals; none of the participants ascribed any of these traits to mothers.

The participants equally ascribed fathers and mothers with traits such as being accepting, attentive, and reliable. However, four men ascribed the quality of “fun” or “playful” to fathers whereas only one father ascribed these traits to mothers—it should be noted that this one participant first listed the traits for fathers and when asked what traits a child should ascribe to mothers, he responded, “The same.” Furthermore, the participants’ describing fathers as “fun” also corresponded with how a number of other participants described their own parenting as “fun,” “active,” or “physical” but did not portray the mother’s parenting style in this way.

Public Perception of the Single Father

While a large number of fathers felt isolated, marginalized, or discriminated against as a single father (as noted in the previous section), other fathers felt comfortable in their role as a single father. Overall, the fathers’ particular reactions appeared to correspond with the immediate, cultural climate in which they lived.

One father who felt marginalized remarked, “There is a really massive cultural bias that says the mom is the primary parent... It pisses me off. I feel unseen.” This same

father noted that “the vast majority of folks I interact with don’t have any conception—even during when I had the kids three-quarters of the time—that I was really pretty much responsible for the majority of the parenting.”

These men frequently perceived themselves in “pioneering” roles in which they either did not know other fathers taking on a primary parenting role or did not feel accepted as a primary, male parent. For instance, this father felt isolated among mothers in his primary role: “When you do something outside of the norm, and when all the other fathers are off to work, and you’re amongst, say, three-hundred moms, and you’re consistently the only guy—it can be a little intimidating.”

Despite the public discomfort some of these fathers reported feeling, they uniformly described that a larger force propelled them through these encounters. “I feel like I had a strong paternal instinct that guided me,” one father said. Another dad reported feeling a kind of “righteous” resistance to feeling “unseen,” remarking, “I guess there’s a kind of determination or will... There’s an element of righteous that comes into it.” In light of the difference from the norm, many of these fathers appeared to take on a kind of quiet protest; when asked how he felt about being a JPC father, one participant said, “I’m proud of it, I wear that badge proudly. I know it’s unusual. I feel pretty strong about it.”

Only two fathers felt little social stigma with regard to their primary parenting role. One father said he did not feel discriminated against though at times he felt “different.” This father attributed his reaction to his immediate surroundings: “I think public perception has generally been somewhat surprised, but [the town I live in] is fairly open to it. It’s not like people haven’t seen it before.”

Another father described an environment in which he's often accompanied by other fathers who play active, primary caretaking roles. Given this father's particular surroundings, he reported feeling comfortable in his role as a JPC father.

It just so happens that at our bus stop now, there's usually four or five kids getting on the bus, and it's four men seeing those kids on my day [when I have my kids]. So I'm a man among men who care about their kids. The sub-culture that I'm in, this is pretty ordinary that men have a really strong relationship with their kids. I don't see any particular impact [of being a single father]. I am not seen as odd by anybody I know.

Summary

In summary, all of the participants in this study reported wanting close relationships with their children and they were pro-active in attaining and keeping these relationships. Following their divorce, the men had a variety of experiences and relationships with their ex-wives, but they all reported that their current relationship with their ex-spouse significantly affected them as well as their relationships with their children.

This chapter presented the major findings in two categories: the anticipated findings based on previous research and findings that were not expected. Anticipated findings generally pertained to the fathers' apparent post-divorce relief stemming from being able to parent free of the mother's critical oversight. Additionally, a majority of men rated the mother's parenting skills as fair or worse, and about half of these men believed the mother's parenting was hampered by mental illness or disinterest. Many of the men also reported considerable anger at the judicial system. All the fathers recommended JPC, and they acquired this custodial arrangement either because they

strongly wanted and pursued it or because the mother was not interested in having full physical custody.

As noted above, the fathers reported considerable resentment towards the court system as well as their ex-spouse, and the intensity and duration of this resentment was not anticipated. Despite notable conflict with their ex-spouses, the men generally did not report any gatekeeping behavior by the mother. The fathers were critical of the mother's parenting, and they tended to believe the mother would rate their own parenting higher than they rated hers. Many of the fathers experienced discrimination and exclusion as a single, primary father, though their experience was largely determined by their immediate community. The fathers were very aware of their non-traditional parenting role, but despite this, they appeared to view gender roles in traditional manners. There appeared to be no direct connection between the amount of the father's physical custodial time and the father's anger at the judicial system, the father/mother post-divorce relationship, or the level of communication between father and mother. Lastly, the fathers often minimized or rationalized their dissatisfaction either with the mother's parenting or the custodial arrangement such that their child seemed to benefit from the supposed problem.

In the *Discussion* section that follows, various findings from above will be explored in greater depth.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study examined the effects of joint physical custody (JPC) on fathers and the father/child relationship. Joint legal custody (JLC) has been researched extensively, but further research on JPC has been needed, especially from the vantage of the custodial father. The major findings from this study to be discussed in this chapter are as follows:

1. The fathers all reported having very close relationships with their children, which were facilitated by the mother's absence. Furthermore, many of the fathers reported they were able to successfully negotiate maternal intrusions that would have affected the father/child relationship. Ultimately, the fathers were at various stages of moving from a triadic relationship (i.e. including the mother) to a dyadic relationship with their child.
2. The fathers generally displayed an intensity of resentment towards their children's mother despite the elapsed time since the divorce. These intense feelings tended to sustain the triadic relationship with the child and ex-spouse.
3. The vast majority of fathers reported feeling isolated and marginalized in their nontraditional parenting role post-divorce. Despite feeling very positive towards their non-traditional role, these men generally viewed gender roles in a traditional manner. As pioneers of JPC, these men were likely transitioning between traditional and nontraditional world views.

4. Many fathers were critical of the mother's parenting or the custodial arrangement. Recognizing they could not change these, the men rationalized how their child could benefit from these areas of concern.

These four findings will first be discussed, followed by a discussion of the study's strengths and limitations as well as the study's implications for policy, further researcher, and the field of social work.

The Father/Child Relationship

This study's primary purpose was to better understand the father/child relationship as influenced by JPC. To this end, the fathers uniformly reported feeling closer to their children as a natural byproduct of their having to assume the day-to-day parenting responsibilities when housing their child. However, a significant number of the men reported that their closeness to their child was also connected to the mother's absence; this absence allowed them to not only focus more fully on their child but to define their relationship with their child on their own terms.

This finding evokes previous research that notes the "father-child relationship is more highly connected to the quality of the co-parental relationship than is the mother-child relationship" (Pruett, Arthur, & Ebling, 2007, p. 714). This is to say that fathers generally relate to their children in a triadic relationship whereas mothers tend to relate to their children in a dyadic fashion. However, for the men in this study, it appears they were at varying stages of transitioning from a triadic to a dyadic relationship. This was apparent in how many fathers reported they were able to resist maternal intrusions into either the father's parenting style or the actual father/child relationship. Many fathers also

reported a conscious distancing from the mother not out of anger but in an attempt to create further psychic separation.

It should be emphasized that this study encountered the fathers at varying stages in their emotional separation from their marriage. Some fathers described their relationship with their children as quite distinct from their relationship with their ex-spouse; other men described this relationship as being affected in varying degrees by the mother in terms of her parenting choices, her influence over the custodial arrangement, and especially in the father's sense of ongoing parental conflict.

Resentment Toward the Mother and the Triadic Relationship

The fathers' intense resentment towards the mother was surprising and unexpected. Previous literature supports the notion that JPC arrangements, while necessitating increased parental communication, also tends to avail itself more readily to couples who experience relatively low pre- and post-divorce conflict (Kelly, Redenbach, & Rinaman, 2005). Thus, it is curious that so many of this study's fathers reported significant and intense resentment or anger at the mothers. This is especially notable if we consider the idea that parental conflict acts as a barrier to achieving a dyadic father/child relationship, which the fathers seemed to desire.

It should be clarified that the fathers' resentment towards and conflict with the mother are not the same thing; it is certainly possible that a father feels resentment but is able to manage this resentment such that it does not produce parental conflict. With this in mind, it is notable that three of the fathers who were generally critical of the mother were still able to maintain a "functional" relationship, suggesting that these fathers were able to keep their criticisms distinct from their actions. However, there

still remained over half of the fathers who were “critical” or “very critical” of the mother and who did not have functional parental relationships. For these men, it is reasonable to conclude that their resentment toward and conflict with the mother were very connected.

If parental conflict functions as a barrier to a dyadic father/child relationship, it was unclear why so many fathers seemed to maintain this conflict. While this study did not directly address this concern with the fathers, there tended to be an overtone of blame towards the mother. This was noted in how the fathers tended to rate the mother’s parenting as worse than she would rate theirs. Furthermore, the fathers tended to be critical of the mother’s parenting but when asked what they might change about their own parenting, few fathers gave self-critical responses. This may have been due, in part, to the fathers’ discomfort with critiquing themselves in front of someone they did not know; perhaps in a follow-up interview, the fathers may have felt more comfortable lowering their defenses. The variance of criticism towards oneself and towards the mother may also have functioned as a protective stance against the mother: if these men were assuming a primary parental role in a society that is outwardly critical and distrusting of single fathers, the fathers may naturally have upheld a defensive, non-self-critiquing posture so as not to reinforce these external criticisms.

As for the parental conflict, it is possible that some of the men in this study experienced post-divorce conflict as a continuation of pre-divorce interparental hostility (Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990) or were still feeling the residues from an emotionally dependent marriage (Bader & Pearson, 1998) or difficult divorce (Kelly, 1991). Because so much of the conflict revolved about the only point of contact—the

children—it seemed that a father’s main contention with the mother involved her parenting choices. In this case, a father’s conflict with the mother might be seen as his advocating for his child’s needs. On the other hand, it should be noted that many of these fathers were at varying stages of accepting their inability to control or change the mother’s parenting. The fathers who accepted their lack of influence over the mother experienced a relatively lower degree of parental conflict.

Straddling Two Worlds

While many fathers’ marginalization as nontraditional parents was largely determined by the father’s immediate community, all of the fathers were very aware of their nontraditional role. Though they were isolated and alienated because of their role, these men took considerable pride and strength from their identity as a primary caregiver. It was surprising, then, that so many of the fathers subscribed to traditional views of gender roles when asked how they would like children to think of mothers and fathers. Interestingly, many of the fathers seemed to have a quiet awareness of this contradiction.

One possible explanation for the divergence between the fathers’ views and their actual practice may be connected to their age. With the average age of the participants nearing 50, many of these fathers were raised in the early 1960s when, despite changing gender roles, most fathers were the primary breadwinner while mothers cared for the children. While this study did not ask about the participants’ own childhood and male role models, it is reasonable to assume most, if not all, of the participants were raised in a culture that subscribed to traditional gender roles. Given their early experiences, these

fathers may still have a bias towards traditional gender roles despite the fact that they are pioneering new roles for men.

Because the men generally did not know other primary caregiving fathers, and because the vast majority of these men did not receive emotional support in their role as a single father, it is possible that they viewed themselves as a societal anomaly and thus still subscribed to the majority view of traditional gender roles. Ultimately, these men found themselves straddling two worlds: the world of their own parents, and their new, unconventional world that they were creating for themselves. Just as the fathers were likely in different, transitional stages between a triadic and dyadic relationship, they were also making the transition between traditional and nontraditional world views.

The Fathers' Positive Spin

Many fathers acknowledged they could not change either the custodial schedule or the mother's parenting style; this recognition did not necessarily mitigate their disapproval. However, a common theme emerged in their acceptance of that which they could not change: they often rationalized that their child would be made stronger, more resilient, or more adaptable as a result of the mother's parenting or a less than agreeable custodial schedule.

It is possible that for many of these men, to not rationalize or put a positive spin on these concerns would lead to further resentment and conflict with the mother, thereby inhibiting a needed distance from her. Ultimately, these men were again left to straddle two worlds of parenting, one within their own home and the other at the mother's. It is likely that left with the choice of having to further negotiate parenting issues with the

mother, the fathers defensively and protectively transformed their criticisms of the mother into potential strengths for their child.

Study's Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

Because the researcher was a man, it is likely that the participants felt more comfortable openly expressing their resentment towards their ex-wives. The researcher's gender may also have had the effect of encouraging the fathers to express resentment towards women as way of forming a camaraderie with the interviewer. This, however, was not the researcher's impression. Instead, it seemed that the men felt an immediate trust towards the interviewer based both on gender and because the interviewer was expressing interest in their gender-oriented marginalization as a single father.

An additional strength centers on this study's examination of the JPC father within the context of the parental relationship. As research supports, the father/child relationship has traditionally existed as a triad involving the mother, and to this end, this study sought to understand the father/child relationship within this context.

Limitations

This study lacked a heterogeneous sample: the participants were predominantly white and well-educated. Because many of the participants were found by word of mouth recruitment, this naturally directed the sample towards the researcher's own demographic. Some studies support that JPC lends itself towards white, middle-class, and well-educated parents, though it is still unclear to what degree JPC exists as a phenomenon limited to class or race. In this case, the findings of this study are inherently

wed to not just JPC men as a defined group, but more specifically to white, well-educated JPC men.

The interview questions did not produce the emotional content from the fathers that was expected. In retrospect, this is understandable; for the participants, talking about their divorce, their parenting, and their relationships with their children and ex-spouses were subjects that carried significant emotional weight. To discuss these matters with an unknown person may have made many of the men uncomfortable or vulnerable. It is possible that with a follow-up interview, these fathers would have felt more comfortable revealing emotions that they had previously withheld.

While this study sought to gather data from the father's perspective, the study was inevitably limited by this vantage and the fathers' natural biases. To more fully understand the father/child relationship, it would be necessary to collect impressions from children. Similarly, the mother's voice was noticeably absent, especially as the fathers reported on their relationship to their ex-spouse. Ultimately, this study functions as one piece to the complex puzzle of family relationships, and the study should be viewed with this limitation in mind.

Further Implications

For Policy

It was not this study's purpose to assess to what degree policy and the legal system discriminate against men in cases of custody. However, it was clear that a number of men perceived unfair treatment by the courts and other public agencies—even those men who reported having no animosity towards the courts often reported having felt mistreated by the courts, though they tended to minimize their experience

by viewing it in relative terms (i.e. that they “had it good compared to others”). Based on the reports by the vast majority of fathers in this study, it appears that public policy relating to a father’s attaining and maintaining JPC needs to be examined. As gender roles evolve and allow men to assume roles that had traditionally been held by mothers, policies may be outdated as they pertain to these men. If active fathers are in the best interest of the child, social policies that inhibit full father involvement may need to be revamped.

For Researchers

Further research is needed to better understand what might hinder and help fathers in attaining dyadic relationships with their children. Specifically, how does parental post-divorce conflict inhibit the formation of the dyadic father/child relationship, and given this, what emotional factors might be causing the father to sustain this conflict? It would also be helpful to understand how parental communication post-divorce is related to the parents’ opinions of each other’s parenting abilities; in this study, no causal relationship was determined or examined. As noted earlier, it was unclear to what degree JPC exists as a phenomenon rooted in class, race, or culture, and here too, further research is needed. Research from the vantage of the child would also be critical to better understand the JPC family dynamics. Longitudinal research examining the long-term effects of JPC on children would also help determine how this form of custody compares to other forms.

For the Field of Social Work

High divorce rates will continue to produce single fathers, and it is projected that the number of single caregiving fathers will continue to increase (Department of Health

and Human Services, 2000). For practitioners, this study may shed some light on the single JCP father's attempts to formulate a new identity on multiple fronts: as a single parent, as a nontraditional caregiver, and as a parent who is transitioning from a triadic to a dyadic relationship with his children.

When communication between JPC parents breaks down, the parents usually use the child as the vehicle for their communication. Social workers could intervene to help the parents establish not just better lines of communication but a sense of post-divorce emotional separation. This separateness will only benefit both parents' relationship with their child. Given a healthy sense of separateness, the parents can then be unified in serving their child's best interests.

Social work needs to find ways to reach out to and support these fathers who perceive themselves as isolated and marginalized. This study may also help those in social work understand how primary caregiving fathers experience society as unwelcoming and discriminatory. Too often social workers experience divorced fathers as neglectful and uninvolved parents; it is important to bear in mind how societal stigmas act to not only reinforce a divorced father's sense of custodial powerlessness but to create self-perpetuating cycles in which discrimination breeds paternal anger, frustration, and apathy towards being an involved parent.

The men's stories collected in this study speak of an unusual strength, but not a form of strength usually associated with masculinity or physical prowess. These men fought for equal time with their children and defined their roles as active, nurturing caregivers despite feeling marginalized. They gained not only a sense of competency as fathers but formed a powerful identity around this role. Ultimately, if it is in the best

interests of the child—and by extension, greater society—to have involved, nurturing parents, fathers who assume this role need encouragement and full support.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Review Approval Letter

December 17, 2008

Evan Shopper

Dear Evan,

Your materials are now in order and we are happy to give our final approval. This should be a most useful study.

Please note the following requirements:

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

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

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

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

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

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

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

CC: Joanne Corbin, Research Advisor

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

December, 2008

Dear Participant,

My name is Evan Shopper and I am a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a study which explores what it's like for fathers whose kid or kids live with him part of the time after a divorce or, if never married, a permanent breakup. There have been many studies which look at divorced dads who have visitation rights but very few studies have looked at how having kids living part-time with fathers affects the fathers and their kids. This study will be used as a masters in social work thesis, and it may also be used in a professional publication and/or presentations on this topic.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a male who 1) has been divorced, separated, or broken up for at least one year, 2) has at least one minor child (i.e. under eighteen years old) who generally stays with you two nights a week, 3) is older than eighteen, 4) is conversant in English (the language used in the interview), 5) experienced significant changes in your parenting role after the breakup, separation, or divorce, and 6) were single for at least six months following the divorce/breakup. If you did find a new partner within six months of your breakup/divorce, you may still participate in the study if your parenting role changed because of the joint custody, and therefore, your being partnered did not significantly impact your parenting role.

I will be conducting a one-hour interview with you in which we talk about what it's like being a dad whose kid(s) live with him part-time. The questions I will ask have already been chosen, and you can answer them in as much detail as you like. The interview will cover areas such as 1) how you feel about the custody arrangement, 2) how your relationship has changed with your kid(s) following the divorce or breakup, 3) how your relationship with your ex has changed. Demographic data such as age, race/ethnicity, length of divorce/separation/breakup, current relational status, education, job status, age and genders of children will be collected at the start of the interview.

Minimal risk from participation is anticipated. You may experience some distress when reflecting on your divorce/breakup or any divorce proceedings. It may also be unpleasant talking about your relationship with your ex. Additionally, you may also feel uncomfortable when talking about any ongoing difficulties you or your child(ren) may be having in connection with the breakup. A list of counseling and mental health resources will be given to all the participants.

By participating in the study, you may enjoy voicing your thoughts and feelings about the struggles and rewards of being father who has a joint physical custody arrangement. You may also gain some insights or appreciation of any difficulties you have had. You may enjoy talking about your experiences and knowing that they may influence people who work with fathers or who make policy decisions about them.

You will not receive compensation (money) for your participation in this study.

The interview will be audiotaped. If anyone transcribes the tapes, I will have him or her sign a confidentiality pledge. I'll also protect your identity by presenting any data summed up as a whole. Any identifying information will be deleted from the transcriptions and when the material is presented, any personal information, quotes, or vignettes will be carefully disguised. Finally, all data, audiotapes, notes, and consent forms will be kept securely for a period of three years as stipulated by federal guidelines after which time they will be destroyed or, if still being used, continued to be kept securely, until I destroy the data.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question. You can withdraw from the study at any time before March 1, 2009, and should you do so, all materials pertaining to you will be destroyed. There is no penalty for withdrawal from the study. You may contact me at any time at the email or phone listed below for questions or concerns about this study. You may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974 with any questions.

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this study.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Signature of Participant _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Contact Information

Evan Shopper

Box 5768

Smith College School for Social Work

Northampton, MA 01063

eshopper@email.smith.edu

(413) 774-6252 extension 119

Please keep a copy of this consent for your records.

Appendix C

Interview Questions

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

- Age
- Age and gender of children
- # of yrs divorced/separated from children's mother
- distance in miles from their mother's residence
- # hours/days/nights kids spend with father vs. that of mother.
- Current relational status: married, separated, additional divorces, in a relationship (specify length), dating, single.
- If with a current partner, length of time with this person.
- Immediately following the break-up with your child's mother, what was the length of time that you were not with another partner.
- Occupation/job status
- Education level
- Race/ethnicity

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Part I: The joint custody (JC) arrangement:
 - Break down the times the kids are with you and with your ex-partner.
 - How flexible or inflexible is this arrangement?
 - How did you arrive at having a JC arrangement?
 - How satisfied are you with the arrangement? What would you change and why? What has surprised you about JPC?
 - What have you had to change (work time/location, residence, own activity level) as a result of the custodial arrangement?
 - Personally, how have you benefited from JC? How has JC been a burden to you?
 - Would you recommend JC to other fathers, and under what circumstances?
- Part II: Describe your relationship with your child(ren) prior to the divorce/breakup:
 - How much time (per week, for example) did you spend with your kids? How was all this time spent?
 - How would your kid describe you as a father before the breakup?
 - How did you parent with your ex? How did your parenting differ? What three words would you use to describe you as a parent, and your ex as a parent?
 - How was the responsibility for disciplining your kids and making decisions about them shared between you and your ex?
 - How did you resolve conflict with your child?
 - What would you have changed in how you were a father before the divorce/breakup?
- Part III: Describe your relationship with your kid now:
 - What has changed? How has your relationship evolved?
 - What challenges do you now face as a parent with your child? How has this changed?
 - How much time (per week, for example) do you spend with your kids? How is all this time spent?
 - How would your child describe you as a father now? How has this changed?

- Earlier, I asked how you and your ex differed in your parenting before the breakup. Have these differences changed since the breakup, and if so, how? (Consider, for example, how you differ with respect to rules and discipline at your houses.)
- How do you resolve conflict with your child now? How has this changed?
- If you could change anything(s) about what kind of dad you are now, what would you change?
- Part IV: Ex-partner relations:
 - Describe your relationship with your ex prior to the divorce/breakup. What worked, what didn't work? How much conflict did you two experience?
 - How did you and your partner divide the childcare before the divorce? What areas were generally you responsible for, what areas was she responsible for, and what areas did you share equally?
 - How would you characterize the actual divorce/breakup/separation?
 - How do you get along with your ex now?
 - How do you resolve disagreements or conflict regarding your kids?
 - What is your opinion of your ex's parenting skills? What do you think her opinion is of yours?
- Part V: Gender roles:
 - What's it like being a man with JPC?
 - What three traits would you want to come to a kid's mind when s/he thinks of her/his father?
 - What three traits would you want to come to a kid's mind when s/he thinks of her/his mother?
- Two additional questions:
 - Are you currently dating or romantically involved with anyone? If so, how has this affected the JC arrangement?
 - Are there other concerns or issues that we didn't talk about but which you'd like to add?