

PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE DIVORCE PROCESS: FROM ATTACHMENT THEORY AND INTERGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: This study examined four possible predictors of parental satisfaction in the first year after divorce: Attachment style, parenting style, perception of own parents' parenting, and the ex-spouse's assessment of the quality of the parent's parenting. Findings among 49 divorced couples showed that the mothers' satisfaction was anchored in themselves and their behavior, fathers' satisfaction in their perceptions of their mothers and ex-wives. Among mothers, the less dismissing their attachment style and the greater the centrality of the child in their parenting style, the more satisfaction they tended to report. Among fathers, greater satisfaction was predicted by more education, perception of their own mother as less overprotective, and their perception of their ex-wife's approval of the quality of their fathering.

KEY WORDS: post-divorce parenting; parenting style; attachment style; parenting satisfaction; intergenerational perspectives; therapy.

Parent-child relationships after divorce are often problematic (Amato, 2000; Amato & Booth, 1996). The first year after the divorce may be particularly trying. Parents, occupied by the myriad economic, social, and emotional adjustments required by divorce (Booth & Amato, 1992; Hazan & Shaver, 1994), may be irritable, impatient, and less available emotionally and physically for their children than they had previously been. Children, angry and distressed by the divorce, may act out in ways that add their own strain to the relationship

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(Amato, 2000; Hetherington, 1999; Kelly, 2000). Although some findings indicate that the tensions may be alleviated over time, especially between children and custodial mothers (Lengua, Wolchik, Sandler, & West, 2000), other findings suggest that problematic parent-child relationships associated with divorce persist throughout the life span (Amato & Booth, 2000). The acknowledged role of the quality of the parent-child relationship to children's emotional adjustment (Lengua et al., 2000) makes it important to explore the relationship after divorce and, more specifically, to try to identify factors that may enhance or impair its quality. The present study examines a number of possible factors, using parental satisfaction with the relationship as the indication of its quality.

The literature names a range of factors that may affect the quality of the parent-child relationship. Various authors have posited or found a positive association between the quality of the relationship and the parent's positive personality features and a negative association between the relationship and parental neuroticism (Belsky, 1984; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Belsky (1984) added child characteristics, factors related to the other parent (Belsky, Campbell, Cohen, & Moore, 1996), including the closeness and intimacy of the parental relationship (Belsky, 1984). Caspi and Elder (1988) and Belsky and Pensky (1988) contend that both personality and marital relationships may link relations between generations.

Parental satisfaction captures a key emotional aspect of parent-child relations after divorce. Divorced parents often experience certain ambivalence toward their children (Tschann, Johnston, Kline, & Wallerstein, 1990; Wallerstein & Lewis, 1996). On the one hand, children and the love they give are an important emotional resource for divorced parents. At the same time, they may necessitate continued contact with the ex-spouse, with all its unpleasantness, and they may be perceived as symbols of the disappointment from the marriage (Tschann et al., 1990). Hence, divorced parents often fantasize their children not being there. The degree of satisfaction with their children may thus be a measure of how well divorced parents have managed their ambivalence.

In addition, findings suggest that parenting satisfaction is associated with the quality of the parenting, both in marriage and after divorce. In a study of married mothers, Slade, Belsky, Aber, and Phelps (1999) found that the more pleasure they took in their parenting, the more positive and less negative their mothering. In a study of divorced fathers, Madden-Derdich and Leonard (2000) found that their satisfaction with their parenting was a significant predictor of their involvement in co-parental interaction.

Despite its importance, however, there has been little exploration of the factors predicting parental satisfaction. Kurdek (1998) found that personality traits linked to masculinity and femininity, namely father's instrumentality and mother's expressiveness, when the child was one year old were associated with the respective parents' satisfaction when the child was eight, regardless of the child's own characteristics. In a study of divorced fathers, Leite and McKenry (2002) found that the level of fathers' satisfaction with their roles as fathers was indirectly affected by the level of conflict they had with their ex-wives and that the less decision-making ability the fathers had in relation to their children's lives, the more dissatisfied the fathers were. Both these studies were conducted on predictors of parental satisfaction within marriage.

Few if any studies have examined factors that may affect the quality of the parent-child relationship in the immediate aftermath of the divorce. Amato and Booth (1996) found that pre-divorce problems in the parent-child relationship and low quality in the parents' marriage before divorce predicted parents' low affection for their children after divorce and, moreover, that divorce further eroded the fathers' affection for their children, although not the mothers'. But they did not conduct their study during what Hertz and Brown (1989) term the "stormy period" of the year or so after the divorce, when the relationships between the two parents, and hence with their children, are likely to be most strained.

The present study, which adds an intergenerational perspective, examines the possible contribution of four factors to parental satisfaction with the parent-child relationship one year after divorce. The four factors are: attachment style, parenting style, perception of own parents' parenting, and ex-spouses' assessment of the quality of the parent's parenting. Each factor is examined separately for fathers and mothers. These factors were chosen in the belief that they may be of particular relevance to the quality of the parent-child relationship during the divorce process, when the parents must cope with the demands of parenting while disengaging emotionally from one another.

ATTACHMENT STYLE

Attachment style is defined as the nature of the bonds of affection that persons form in close relationships. Attachment theory identifies a "secure" style and two or three variously conceptualized "insecure"

styles, the main ones being preoccupied or anxious/ambivalent and avoidant (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Main and Solomon, (1990) propose a disorganized style. Bartholomew (1990) divides the avoidant style into fearful avoidant and dismissing avoidant. According to the theory, each attachment style entails deeply rooted views of the self and others and issues in affect and behaviors that reflect these underlying views.

A large body of research provides evidence of the distinctiveness of the styles and their behavioral and affective manifestations (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002), as well as the distinctiveness of the relative advantages of secure style in stressful situations (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). There are also studies that suggest the advantages of secure attachment in coping with divorce and in parenting. In an empirical study examining the links between attachment style and the mental health of divorcing persons, Birnbaum, Orr, Mikulincer, and Florian (1997) found that attachment style moderated persons' affective reactions to their divorce and was significantly related to their appraisal and coping with the crisis, which in turn mediated the association between divorce and mental health. In a theoretical paper Todorski (1995) linked Main's (1991) four adult attachment patterns (autonomous/secure, preoccupied/anxious-ambivalent, dismissing/avoidant, and disorganized-unresolved) to distinctive types of post divorce parental communication (Ahrons & Rogers, 1987).

Similarly, Cohn, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson (1992) argue that features associated with secure attachment, notably good communication skills; the use of constructive coping strategies; and the ability to integrate contradictory emotions, regulate negative emotions, and solve conflicts cooperatively and constructively, enable divorcing parents with a secure attachment style to share parenting with their ex-spouse, with attention to their children's best interests, while the insecure attachment styles in divorcing parents constitute risk factors for difficulties in parent-child relationships.

Studies of parenting suggest that attachment style may be associated with the degree to which parents are able to respond to their children (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Ricks, 1985). Parents' secure attachment style has been found to predict their sensitivity, warmth, and supportiveness toward their children (Bar-On, Eland, Kleber et al., 1998). Cohn et al. (1992) reported that secure mothers and fathers were warmer, more responsive, and more able to set appropriate limits for their children and that their children were warmer toward them and less angry than children of non-secure mothers.

Parents' attachment security has been found to be predictive of behavior toward their children (Crowell & Feldman, 1988; Grossmann, Fremmer-Bombil, Rudolph, & Grossman, 1988; Ward & Carlson, 1995). For instance, securely attached mothers, compared with insecure mothers, appeared to show more warmth and supportiveness during a challenging activity and to provide clearer and more helpful assistance which encouraged learning and mastery in their children, while insecure mothers appeared to switch between over-protecting their children and inviting role reversal child parentification (Van Ijzendoorn, 1995).

Both lines of research suggest that attachment style may be a predictor of parent-child relations in general and in divorce in particular.

EXPERIENCE OF ONE'S OWN PARENTS

Authors suggest that person's experiences of the parenting they received as children affects both their attachment styles (Ainsworth, 1989) and the quality of their own parenting (George & Solomon, 1999). Research in three generation families indicates some support for parental personality characteristics predicting parent-child relations (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Parents' internal representations of caregiving depend mostly on assimilation of their own rearing experiences (George & Solomon, 1999). These experiences may become a resource for sensitivity to the children's needs, especially in times of stress, or hinder the parents' capacities with the 'ghosts' of their relationships with their own parents (Olson, Martin, & Halverson 1999).

A review of the literature by Van Ijzendoorn (1992) provides support for the intergenerational transmission of parenting styles, defined as the earlier generations' influence on the parenting attitudes and behaviors of the next generation. Empirical studies show that both detrimental types of parenting (e.g., harsh and rejecting parenting, child maltreatment; Weiss, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1992) and positive parenting (e.g., affection, supportiveness; Simon & Baxter, 1993; Vermulst, de Brock, & von Zutphen, 1990; Olsen et al., 1999) are linked across generations. Our assumption is that parents who experienced their own parents as more caring and less controlling will themselves be more caring and less controlling parents and hence be more satisfied with their children than those who experienced their parents as indifferent and unsupportive.

OWN PARENTING STYLE

Parents differ in their respect for their children's autonomy, their attempts to control their children through guilt and anxiety, their consistency, their child-centeredness, and their closeness or detachment (Cohen & Dibble, 1974). Based on the literature, we predict that mothers and fathers who show greater respect for their children's autonomy, less controlling, greater consistency, greater child centeredness, and less detachment will express greater satisfaction with their children during the divorce process.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE OTHER PARENT'S VIEW OF THEIR PARENTING

In marriage, parenting is a joint endeavor, even where, as is usually the case, the mother is more actively involved than the father in the day-to-day tasks of bringing up the children. When the marriage breaks up, however, the many difficulties of single parenting (Cohen, Dattner, & Luxenburg, 1996) means that the parents may still need not only the instrumental cooperation of their former spouse, but also the latter's esteem and valuation of their parenting ability for them to be able to enjoy their relationship with their children. This suggestion is supported by Belsky and et al.'s (1996) finding that the quality of the parent child relationship is related to the closeness and intimacy of the parental relationship, as well as Leite and McKenry's (2002) findings showing that post-divorce spousal conflict reduced fathers' satisfaction with their paternal role.

METHOD

Participants and Sampling Procedures

The research participants were the parents in 49 Jewish Israeli families who were legally divorced in the year prior to the study. In all the families, both parents participated, making for 98 participants in all. In all cases the mother was the custodial parent. The mothers' mean age was 39.9 ($sd = 4.59$), the fathers' mean age 38.3 ($sd = 5.79$). The parents' education was as follows: Mothers: 2% had only elementary school, 11% had vocational education, 30% high school, 11% post-high school, 13% some college, and 33% a bachelors degree or

more. Fathers: 6% had only elementary school, 16% vocational education, 32% high school, 17% post-high school, 6% some college, and 36% a bachelors degree or more. The distribution of the parents' economic status was: Mothers: 19% very poor, 36% fair, 40% good, and 4% very good; Fathers: 13% very poor, 53% fair, 31 good, and 2% very good. With respect to religiosity 30% of the women and 25% of the men described themselves as traditional, and 70% of the women and 75% of the men as non-observant. Forty six percent of the women and 42% of the men reported a relationship with a new partner. With regard to the children on whom the parents reported, 98% were the oldest child. Their mean age was 12 years old ($sd = 4.9$); 55% were girls, the remainder were boys.

The participants were enlisted with the help of family court social workers. It is customary in divorce proceedings in Israel for the presiding judge to assign every family with children a family court social worker, whose job it is to ensure that the divorce arrangements that are made protect the best interests of the child. Between May 1, 2001 and November 30, 2001, the court social workers in central Israel asked the divorcing couples whose cases they were handling to participate in the study. Where both the spouses agreed, the social worker administered the study questionnaires. The sample thus includes only ex-couples in which both former spouses agreed to participate. The study was authorized by the Helsinki Commission. All the participants gave their informed consent to take part in the study.

Measures

Each parent completed four self-report questionnaires:

Socio-demographic questionnaire queried age, education, occupation, economic status; whether there was a steady relationship with a new partner, and a relationship with the other parent.

Satisfaction was measured on a self-report questionnaire asking the parents to indicate their level of satisfaction with their relationship with their oldest child on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 = very dissatisfied to 10 = very satisfied.

Parents' attachment style was assessed using the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), measuring Bartholomew's (1990) four attachment style categories: secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part contains four paragraphs, each describing feelings and attitudes that characterize one of the attachment styles. Subjects are

asked to indicate which description best fits them. In the second part, the four paragraphs are broken up into the sentences that compose them. There are 20 sentences in all, five for each attachment style. For each, subjects are asked to indicate the degree to which it characterizes their own behaviors in close relationships, on a 6-point Likert-type scale, with 1 = not at all to 6 = very strongly. This measure has moderate test-retest reliability (stability after eight months was 63% for women and 56% for men) and good construct validity (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1995). The existence and distinctiveness of these four attachment prototypes, and their correspondence with the subjects' relationships with family and friends are supported by Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) original findings, as well as by subsequent investigations (Bartholomew, 1990; Cozzarelli, Sumer, & Major, 1998; Diehl, Elnick, Bourbeau, & Labouvie-Vief, 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Levy, Blatt, & Shaver, 1998; Simon & Baxter, 1993; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992).

In the present study internal consistency for each of the attachment styles was good: $\alpha = .62-.78$ (Secure = .62; Preoccupied = .65; Fearful = .72; Dismissing = .78).

Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979) is a 25-item self-report measure designed to assess persons' perceptions of their parents' bonding behavior during the first 16 years of life. Subjects are asked to fill out the questionnaire twice, once with reference to their mother, once with reference to their father. Each item describes a type of parental behavior, and subjects are asked to indicate the degree to which it describes the parent in question on a 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (very much like my mother/father) to 4 (very unlike my mother/father). The PBI consists of two subscales: Care and Overprotection. The Care subscale contains 12 items that measure "care/involvement versus indifference/rejection" (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979, pp. 2-3). The Overprotection subscale contains 13 items that measure "control/over-protection versus encouragement of independence" (Parker et al., 1979, p. 3). Ideal parenting is represented by a low score on Over-protectiveness and a high score on Care.

Adequate reliability and validity (predictive and concurrent) for the PBI have been demonstrated in several studies, with significant correlations between participants' reports of their parents' bonding behaviors and the reports of siblings and of judges who interviewed their mothers (Bachar et al., 1998).

In the present study internal consistency for each of the subscales was: overprotective- $\alpha = .86-.88$; caring- $\alpha = .91-.93$

Parent's Report questionnaire (PR; Cohen & Dibble, 1974) is a 25 item self-report measure designed to assess parents' perceptions of their own parental style in relation to one of their children. Parents are asked to rate on a 5-point Likert type scale the degree to which each item characterizes their parental behavior toward the child in question. The PR consists of five scales which assess: parental respect for the child's autonomy (e.g., "I like him to do things himself"), parental control through guilt and anxiety (e.g., "I let him know that if he really cared he would not do anything to cause me worry"), parental consistency (e.g., "I see to it that he obeys what he is told"), child-centeredness (e.g., "I give him a lot of care and attention"), and parental mood and detachment (e.g., "I withdraw from being with my child when he displeases me").

In the present study, the internal consistency for each of the subscales ranged from $\alpha = .53$ to $.91$.

Perception of other parent's assessment of the quality of one's parenting was measured by a single question, constructed by the authors: "In your view, do you think that the father/mother of your children considers you a good parent?" Participants were asked to respond on a 3-point scale: 1 = yes, 2 = somewhat; 3 = no.

RESULTS

Two multiple stepwise regressions were performed, one for the fathers and one for the mothers, of factors predicting parents' satisfaction with the relationship with their children. Prior to carrying out the regressions, Pearson's correlations were performed between all the examined predictor variables and parental satisfaction for each parent. Only those factors which were found to correlate significantly with the dependent variable were entered into the regressions. The factors were entered in five steps: in the first step were introduced the socio-demographic variables of participants' age and education in order to control for their influence on the predictors. Participants' perceptions of their own parents' parenting style were added in the second step (caring father in mothers' regression; overprotective mother in fathers' regression). The participants' attachment styles were added in the third step (dismissing style in mothers' regression; none in fathers'). In the fourth step, the participants' own parenting style was entered (centrality of child in mothers' regression; nothing in fathers'). Finally, the participants' perceptions of the other parent's assessment of the quality of their parenting was entered in the fifth step (entered only in fathers' regression).

The findings are presented separately for each parent.

Mothers: The results of the multiple regression of factors predicting mothers' satisfaction are presented in Table 1.

As noted in the table, the factors accounted for a total of 47% of the total variance in the mothers' satisfaction.

The mother's age made a negative contribution of 14%, with the younger the mother the less satisfied she was. However, this contribution was limited to the first step, and disappeared with the entrance of "caring father" in the second step. Here, the mothers' perceptions of their fathers' as caring added another 10% to the variance, with those who saw their fathers as more caring expressing greater satisfaction with their own relationship with their child. With the addition of

TABLE 1

Multiple Regression of Factors Predicting Mothers' Satisfaction with their Child (including the perception of the other parent functioning)

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>R</i> ²
<i>Step 1</i>				.14*
Age	-.02	.03	-.31*	
Education	-.12	.15	-.13	
<i>Step 2</i>				.24*
Age	-.14	.06	-.18	
Education	-.14	.05	-.19	
Caring father	-.19	.05	.34*	
<i>Step 3</i>				.33*
Age	-.28	.15	-.15	
Education	-.69	.20	-.30*	
Caring father	.27	.15	.15	
Dismissing style	-.22	.07	-.36*	
<i>Step 4</i>				.47*
Age	-.23	.12	-.14	
Education	-.22	.10	-.22	
Caring father	-.70	.30	.01	
Dismissing style	-.92	.41	-.30*	
Parental style—centrality	.69	.29	.34*	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

“dismissing attachment style” in the third step, the contribution of “caring father” too lost its significance. “Dismissing style” added another 9% to the variance. This contribution remained significant in the fourth step, where “centrality” added another 14% to the explanation of the variance.

Fathers: The results of the multiple regression of factors predicting fathers’ satisfaction are presented in Table 2.

As noted in the table, the factors accounted for a total of 46% of the total variance in the fathers’ satisfaction.

Three factors—the fathers’ education, their perceptions of their mothers’ over-protectiveness, and their perceptions of their ex-wives’ assessment of the quality of their parenting—contributed to the variance. Education contributed 15%, with the more educated the father, the more satisfied he tended to be with his relationship with his child. This contribution remained significant in all the steps of the regression. The fathers’ perceptions of their mothers as over-protective added another 21% to the variance. The more over-protective they perceived their mothers to have been, the less satisfied they tended to be. The contribution of this variable also remained significant in the

TABLE 2

Multiple Regression of Factors Predicting fathers’ Satisfaction with their Child (including reference to the perception of the other parent functioning)

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	R^2
<i>Step 1</i>				.15*
Age	-.02	.09	-.03	
Education	.56	.25	.38*	
<i>Step 2</i>				.36**
Age	-.03	.08	-.01	
Education	.60	.22	.41*	
Overprotective mother	-.13	.04	-.45*	
<i>Step 3</i>				.46*
Age	-.02	.08	.01	
Education	.52	.21	.35*	
Overprotective mother	-.14	.04	-.48*	
Perception of the mother parenthood	-.92	.40	-.32*	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

next step. Finally, the fathers' perceptions of their ex-wives' view of the quality of their parenting contributed another 10% to the variance, with fathers who believed that their ex-wives viewed them as good parents expressing greater satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The major finding of the study is that different factors predicted parental satisfaction in mothers and fathers. In general, the mothers' satisfaction was anchored in themselves, in how they felt and behaved toward their child, while the fathers' satisfaction was anchored largely in their perceptions of the key women in their lives.

Among mothers, degree of satisfaction was predicted by dismissing attachment style and centrality of the child in her own parenting style. The less dismissing the mother's attachment style and the greater the centrality of the child in her parenting style, the more satisfied she tended to be. These findings complement one another, in that mothers with a dismissing attachment style would be less responsive to their children's needs than mothers with other attachment styles (Belsky, 1999), while mothers who scored high on centrality could be expected to give high priority to their children's needs. Dismissing mothers, it may be suggested, would be less satisfied with their children because they would see them as a burden, while mothers who gave their children a central place in their lives would not feel burdened or resentful. Partial support for this explanation is provided by Slade and associates' (1999) finding that dismissing mothers are more angry with their infants than mothers with other attachment styles.

Among fathers, greater satisfaction was predicted by more education, perception of their own mother as less overprotective, and perceptions of their ex-wife's approval of the quality of their fathering. The finding that greater education was associated with greater satisfaction is consistent with findings showing that better educated fathers tend to participate more in childcare than their less educated peers (Walker & McGraw, 2000; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998) and may reflect expectations of fatherhood among the higher socio-economic strata.

The finding that fathers who view their mothers as having been overprotective report less parental satisfaction may be explained by possible detrimental consequences of overprotective parenting: heightened inter-generational conflict and impaired maturity and

autonomy in the offspring (Watson, Little, & Biderman, 1992). Fathers who perceive their mothers as having been overprotective may project their conflicts with their mother on their children, create conflicts with their children by becoming overprotective parents themselves, and/or have insufficient autonomy and maturity to parent well. Any of these outcomes could reduce their satisfaction with their children.

The finding that greater satisfaction was reported by fathers who believed that their ex-wives thought well of their parenting may be explained in two ways. One is that the ex-wives' appraisal accurately reflects the quality of the fathers' parenting, and the fathers' satisfaction stems largely from their sense of competence and the good relationships they form with their children. The other is anchored in the power and influence mothers have as custodial parents after divorce. Mothers who disapprove of their ex-husband's parenting may put up barriers to access and/or convey their unfavorable opinion to their children, affecting their children's attitudes and creating strains in their relationship with him. Either behavior would lead to frustration and reduced satisfaction on the father's part.

The finding points to the continuing importance of wifely support for fathers' parenting. Similar need for such support is indicated by findings that fathers whose wives value and respect their parenting are more involved with their children than fathers whose wives do not (McBride & Rane, 1998). The need has been explained by the relative ambiguity of fathers' "job description", as opposed to that of mothers, making fathers dependent on their wives to define and direct their fatherhood (Doherty et al., 1998; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000). Support and affirmation by the children's mother may be particularly important after divorce, when the societal norms defining the parenting role of the non-residential, non-custodial father remain ambiguous (McKenry, Price, Fine, & Serovich, 1992; Seltzer, 1991) and when many non-custodial, non-residential fathers feel a sense of inadequacy, incompetence (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1985; Kissman, 1997), and devaluation as parents (Jacob, 1983; Lehr & MacMillan, 2001; Minton & Pasley, 1996; Riessman, 1990; Umberson & Williams, 1993).

Contrary to expectations, attachment style contributed less to parental satisfaction than expected. In particular, we had expected secure attachment to be a predictor of satisfaction and the other insecure styles, the preoccupied and the fearful, to be predictors of lack of satisfaction. Our findings are inconsistent with both theory and previous research. Further exploration is required to try to determine why.

The study has several limitations. Parental satisfaction was examined by only one question, leaving a certain ambiguity as to what

the respondents were satisfied or dissatisfied with (e.g., their relations with their children, their own functioning as parents, the co-parenting relationship). The nature of the co-parenting relationship, which could have an impact on each parent's relations with his or her children and hence their satisfaction, was not assessed. Moreover, to keep the paper focused clearly on the predictors of parental satisfaction, the associations between the grandparents' bonding behavior and the parents' attachment styles and own parenting behavior were not examined. In addition, because of the great difficulty of getting both parents in divorce to participate in research studies, the sample size was not large. Finally, because the recruiting of the participants was anonymous, it was impossible to provide information regarding couples who refused participation and how they differed from the participants. Nonetheless, the study is one of the few that focuses on parental satisfaction in the difficult first year after divorce. The findings, which show gender differences in the predictors of parental satisfaction, have important clinical implications.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

The major clinical implications pertain to fathers. The finding that fathers' satisfaction is anchored in their perceptions of the behavior and opinions of their mothers and ex-wives points to the need to help fathers, and especially divorced fathers, establish an independent parenthood in which they would view and conduct themselves as parents with no relation to the conduct of the women in their lives. Emotionally, this would mean loosening the tight association that many men make between fatherhood and marriage (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Instrumentally, it would mean helping them to develop parenting competencies, especially sensitivity to the needs and feelings of their children, skill in communicating with them, and proficiency in caretaking tasks that are conventionally viewed as the domain of mothers (Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000). It would also mean helping them to cope with the problems of non-custodial, non-residential fatherhood and to feel like fathers despite the many limitations that this situation imposes on their paternity. Thought might also be given to ways of promoting the development of clearer social expectations of fathers, whether divorced or not.

These various tasks entail empowering divorced men in their fatherhood. Ideally, the process would begin before the divorce, when divorce mediators could help the divorcing parents to construct a parenting plan that would cover how they will meet their children's needs after the divorce. Such a plan should detail what each parent is responsible for doing and when and contain an agreed upon mechanism for resolving disputes. An agreement of this sort, worked out with the divorcing parents, would reinforce the sense of mastery of both of them, while providing the divorced father whose children remain in the custody of their mother with a structured framework for fulfilling his paternal role.

Psycho-educational intervention, during or after the divorce, could provide divorced fathers with needed legitimization and practical guidance. It could legitimize the many emotional and instrumental hardships that divorced men encounter as non-custodial fathers and help them to develop ways of spending quality time with their children despite the impediments. It could raise their awareness of their children's vulnerabilities in the wake of their divorce, suggest productive ways of relating to the vulnerabilities, and provide support for their doing so even as they are preoccupied with their own pain at the breakup of their marriage.

Last but not least, divorced fathers who seek therapy or counseling should be helped to work through the emotional impediments to their formation of an independent paternal identity. Many divorced fathers do feel themselves to be fathers and do feel that their fatherhood is important to them, but find it difficult to function as fathers. Since this disparity often arises from difficulties that divorced men have in separating their identity as fathers from their identity as husbands and their feelings for their ex-wives, therapists should help them to make this separation. Therapists might also help divorced fathers to build their paternity by working with them on identifying such things as what is important to them in their relationship with their children, what they enjoy doing with their children, what they can do with them, and what they can do independently and what requires negotiation with their ex-wives.

In addition, professionals working with divorcing or divorced mothers should encourage and help them to respect their ex-husband's fatherhood, give it space, and not place obstacles in its way. Where the mother does create impediments to her ex-husband's relationship with their children, therapy is essential to help her to separate her own parenting from her relationship with her ex-husband and to loosen her grip on the children.

FUTURE STUDY

Further study is recommended. It is worth beginning by developing a multi-item measure to assess and define various aspects of satisfaction, using several questions for each. This is necessary to provide a clearer picture. Future studies should also include factors that may have an impact on the parent's satisfaction, such as the post-divorce co-parenting relationship parenting competencies, and features of the child and the parent-child relationship. More direct and diversified study of post-divorce family relationships is also called for.

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