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Date: 4-8-2017 [Later signature]
formally Linda L. Edwards
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The thesis of Linda L. Edwards entitled

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[Signature]
Mentor(s)

[Signature]
Director, Liberal Studies Program

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Date
DIVORCE AND THE MORAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENT MALES

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

Linda L. Edwards

School of Summer and Continuing Education
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.
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DIVORCE AND THE MORAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENT MALES

Linda L. Edwards

Mentor: Jesse A. Mann, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Research has shown that with the increase rate of divorce, approximately 50 percent of American children will experience living in a single-parent household before they reach the age of 18. With the increase of single-parent families, it is evident that the American traditional family is on the decline. Although the institution of marriage and family is still highly regarded, it appears that the value of individuality and independence has caused the importance of a stable family structure for children to take a back seat in society. As a result, the well-being of many children lies in the shadow of parental interests of pursuing individual happiness and other emotional gratifications.

In most cases, family disruption is typified by the absence of the biological father, whose presence is needed in the family to work with the mother, reciprocally, to successfully socialize their children. Father absence may be in the form of death, divorce, or abandonment. Whatever form it may present itself, the family is faced with many problems that undermine the moral and personal development of the children involved. In some cases, these devastating changes are unable to be reversed and may remain with the child into adulthood.

During the research on my thesis, I was reminded and became more
informed about what the effects of divorce can do to a mother and her children, and the different outcomes children experience. Therefore, my argument is that children raised in intact families are better prepared for life than children raised in single parent families.

Children who are raised by both biological parents tend to have a better chance at life. This is not to say that children who are raised in single-parent families do not experience success. It is a fact that there are many people who are leaders in our society that came from disrupted families. Nor am I saying that all children who were raised in intact families are always successful. Likewise, there are adults, for one reason or another, who seem to have not gotten a fair shake in life. It is just that children who grow up in single-parent families have a higher risk of falling prey to the consequences that are associated with the absence of the biological father.

In my research I referred to authors of books, journals, and magazines who have done extensive research on the subject of children of divorce. In terms of the sex of the child, I found that the effects of divorce were experienced in similar ways by male and female children. I also discovered that many children who had competent custodial parents, and effective support systems escaped many of the effects that are associated with family disruption. In addition, I found that for some families, separation and divorce was a welcomed relief, rather than aggravation, especially if the level of intense conflict was high. In spite of all of this, the scales continued to tip in favor of intact families over single-parent families.
Stepfamilies, a notable growing family form, tend to ameliorate some of the problems associated with single-parent families in terms of improving the standard of living. However, children of stepfamilies also encounter many problems adjusting to this family form. As a result, children are better off in intact families, then they are in stepfamilies.

In conclusion, children of intact families, on average, are better off than those of other family forms. Because of the increase rate of divorce, many children are experiencing life without the advantages that come with intact families. Therefore, it is inevitable that our future, which are our children, may be destined to have more problems than we could ever imagine.
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The Decline of the American Family

I can clearly remember in the early 1960's, when I was a little girl, watching the popular television shows, “Leave it to Beaver,” and “Father Knows Best.” The structures of the families portrayed in these programs were ones to which I and many others could relate; they were traditional families that consisted of the biological mother and father and the children under 18 years of age. The fathers were the breadwinners, who worked outside of the home, and the mothers were called housewives because they worked at home taking care of the children. I can also recall scenes at the dinner table in these programs where the children discussed their day at school and fathers casually talked about their day at the office. These families demonstrated strong affective ties, emulating many families of that period; particularly the period when divorce was relatively uncommon. Family structures such as that of the Cleavers and the Andersons represented 60 percent of American households. Now, they represent only approximately 3 percent of the families,¹ especially if all the widely acceptable family forms were considered.

The family, which has always been the most significant and the most basic institution of society has taken on a new appearance. Unfortunately, the divorce

rate tripled between 1960 and 1982, leveling off at approximately 50 percent; with one out of two marriages ending in divorce.\textsuperscript{2} Stephanie Coontz made the same observation and went on to say that 60 percent of second marriages will most likely end in divorce as well.\textsuperscript{3} As the result of this, many families are headed by single parents; many of them by single mothers. Although there are single-parent households headed by fathers, approximately 90 percent of single parent households are headed by mothers\textsuperscript{4}. Since there are more families headed by single females, I will focus on paternally-absent, rather than maternally-absent families.

During the early part of this century, divorce was very rare in this country because there were social stigmas and restraints in place. Furstenberg and Cherlin commented on the fact that divorce was viewed as a social disgrace, and it was only under extreme situations the divorce was accepted. Otherwise, society was determined to not make it easy for couples to break their obligation to one another and to their families.\textsuperscript{5} According to Dafoe, “divorce was considered as deviant behavior,” especially when it posed a threat to the well-being of the mother and

\textsuperscript{2}Barna, 10.


\textsuperscript{5}Frank F.Furstenberg, Jr., Andrew Cherlin, Divided Families (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) 1.
children. It also was a public acknowledgment of failure.

In the early 1960's, the American perspective toward divorce was different from what it is today. In their presentation, Furstenberg and Cherlin discussed a survey that was taken in the 1960's where the majority of people surveyed thought that couples should remain together for the sake of the children even though their marriages were unhappy. But, by the 1980's, though Americans still believed in the institution of marriage, they felt that couples should not remain together if they were unhappy; it made no difference whether or not children were involved. This is a sign of changes in social values. What has happened to the American family which has caused the rate of divorce to triple, attitudes regarding divorce to change, and our children's well-being to be at risk?

Some researchers have attributed the rise of the divorce rate to the increase rate of married women in the labor force. Women have left domestic duties and the care of their children for employment outside of the home. As of 1988, half of all families with children had two-parent wage earners. The father-only wage earners represented only 25 percent of all families with children. This was a

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7Dafoe, 49.

8Furstenberg, Cherlin, 6.

9Furstenberg, Cherlin, 6.

10Stephanie Coontz, 18.
significant decline from 44 percent in 1975.\textsuperscript{11} Today, more than 59 percent of women are in the labor force.\textsuperscript{12} To that end, gender roles have changed significantly, and there is no longer separate sphere division of labor between husband and wife.\textsuperscript{13} Fathers are no longer the sole providers or "breadwinners" for their families. The role is now shared with their wives, who not only share in providing for the family, they also provide care for the children. But the care for and the attention to the children by mothers in the labor force is more than likely less than that of mothers who are not employed outside of the home.\textsuperscript{14} More and more children are arriving home from school to a paid care provider or to an empty home without supervision.

Nevertheless, women are fulfilling their need for self-sufficiency and are pursuing the feeling and prestige for individuality despite the extreme changes to which their children may be susceptible.\textsuperscript{15} In their quest for self-sufficiency, many women find independence, and monetary gratification that sometimes equal to or exceed that of their husbands. As a result, the husband may feel inadequate as a provider for his family. This, in many cases may cause parental conflict and

\textsuperscript{11}Coontz, 18.

\textsuperscript{12}Barna, 11.


\textsuperscript{14}Barna, 12.

less encouragement to maintain a marriage when difficulty arises. 16

Another possible reason for the rise of the divorce rate is the contemporary standard for young couples to enter into marriage based on love and romance. Though love and romance creates emotional gratification, it is not the answer to maintaining and sustaining a marriage. 17 Like many of the Europeans, Americans have embraced the romantic love complex, where focus is placed on personal and emotional considerations rather than family influence. 18

In some cultures, by way of contractual agreement, the parents are responsible for the task of selecting spouses for their children. In accordance with this custom, the parents place considerable emphasis on companionship and the interests of the family rather than love relations. The couple’s love relations are developed subsequent to marriage. 19 However, before the 1960’s, sociologists stressed that the move from love to marriage was a dangerous recipe for matrimonial success. 20 Once the emotional gratification diminishes, so does the commitment to maintain the marriage. Eventually, the need or urge will arise to find a new partner to fulfill the emotional void.

David Popenoe cited two other additional social trends that may be also

16LaHaye, 173.
17Furstenberg, Cherlin, 5.
18Furstenberg, Cherlin, 4.
19LaHaye, 17.
20Furstenberg, Cherlin, 5.
attributed to the changes of the traditional family—the decline in fertility and the sexual revolution. The decline in fertility was close to 50 percent, between 1960 and 1989, and had set precedence as the lowest in U.S. history.21 The number of children per women had declined from 3.7 to 1.9, which shows that many women are making the decision to have only one child or to remain childless.22

The sexual revolution brought about the most significant change in this country, the greatest being from 1971 to 1982 with the increase of premarital sex23. According to Popenoe, the proportion of premarital sex by unmarried girls soared from 28 to 44 percent, and he pointed out that this social trend also showed a change in societal values; for example, in 1967, 85 percent of Americans viewed premarital sex as morally wrong; by 1979, only 37 percent felt this way.24

In response to the questions in regard to the changes of the traditional families and to the changes of the attitudes toward divorce, it appears that the increasing rate of married women in the work place has brought about significant changes in the family in terms of gender roles and relationships, and the rapidly diminishing spherical division of labor between spouses. In addition, individual pursuits of love and romance in relationships as a prerequisite to marriage does

21Popenoe, 18.
22Popenoe, 19.
23Popenoe, 19.
24Popenoe, 19.
not provide a sufficient foundation to maintain matrimonial vows, “till death do us part.”

Finally, the fertility decline and the sexual revolution played a part in the decline of the traditional family. Women are opting to have fewer children than a few decades ago, and premarital sex for pleasure have obviously displaced marital sex to add children to the family.

This is not to say that every married, working woman’s marriage will end in divorce. Nor am I attempting to convey that every marriage that is based on love and romance, rather than companionship, will have an early demise. For, there are numerous married women who have and who are successfully balancing the care of the family and their careers; as well as there are marriages that were initially based on love that have survived for many years. What I am saying is that these factors and other factors increase the risks for an unsuccessful marriage, which tends to place the future of the children involved in a precarious state. Yet, in a society that values individual choices, human beings have the desire to pursue their own individual happiness. Those who are parents will attempt to simultaneously respond to their values and needs and to their children’s need for security and stability. Unfortunately, parents have interests separate from the

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26Dafoe, 48.

27Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 233.
interests of their children\textsuperscript{28}, and it is their children’s well being that is undermined.

\textsuperscript{28}Friedman, 3.
II

The Importance of a Two-Parent Family

It has always been considered that the best environment for a child is the family and the presence of both biological parents. “Each parent serves as a role model and provides a source of emotional support, supervision, guidance, practical assistance, and information for their children, in addition to social skills, such as cooperation, negotiation and compromise.” Children, more or less, are taught by the biological parents to become socially competent adults in society. In other words, the parents’ chief responsibility is to socialize their children and to ensure that all of their needs are met.

A two-parent family structure is an ideal system because it has checks and balances that promote parental responsibility and protects the children from

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30 Dafoe, 48.


parental neglect and abuse.\textsuperscript{33, 34} Friedman refers to this system as "parental social control," which is made possible by strong affective ties of the members of the family, as well as by observing and authorizing parental investments.\textsuperscript{35} If one parent does not give his or her fair share of contributions toward the well-being of the child, the other parent encourages him or her to do so.

Family disruption results in the attenuation of internal social control. Obviously, there is a significant lack of social control in single-parent families and the parental incentive to contribute to the child's well-being is diminished by the absence of the other parent. Therefore, in the absence of one parent, there is no one who shares the emotional and mutual interest in the children, as the custodial parent, to ensure that all needs are met. Consequently, the child receives suboptimal contributions. A prime example of suboptimal contributions is the failure of the noncustodial parent to provide adequate child support.\textsuperscript{36} Often, it becomes necessary to seek third-party enforcement in an attempt to restore the child's standard of living.

Another example of suboptimal contribution toward children is when the custodial parent is unable to provide the supervision and attention that her

\textsuperscript{33}McLanahan, Sandefur, 28.

\textsuperscript{34}Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 262.

\textsuperscript{35}Friedman, 6.

\textsuperscript{36}Friedman, 6.
children need.\textsuperscript{37} As with the father, the lack of social control does not give the mother incentive to meet all the needs of her children. In addition, inadequate resources makes it increasingly difficult to effectively provide many of their needs.

In conclusion, an intact family can effectively socialize their children and provide their needs because of internal social controls or checks and balances. Within one household, each parent subtly oversees the contributions of the other to make sure that their children's emotional and physical needs are met. There are numerous reciprocal relationships, role demands and expectations that are involved within an intact family. On the other hand, families headed by a single parent may be voided of internal social controls and may lack incentives and resources to make adequate provisions for the family. As the result, children of single parent families may not receive adequate emotional and physical needs. Obviously, parental roles are different, and it may appear that one parent provides more to the family in the way of care and attention of the children than the other parent. However, both roles are important and are not independent of the other.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37}Friedman, 6.

\textsuperscript{38}Lamb, 30.
III

_The Importance of the Father's Presence in the Family_

In spite of the rise in the divorce rate and the increase of father-absent children, society has come to believe that the presence of the father in the home is not necessary. Many Americans now agree that single mothers are capable of raising their children comparable to that of married couples.\footnote{David Blankenhorn, _Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem_ (New York: Basic Books, 1995) 76.} Differently from entertainment programs of 3 to 4 decades ago, popular television sitcoms today are showing female characters who are making the decision to raise their children without the father and without being married. A well known example of this is the CBS prime-time sitcom "Murphy Brown" that aired in 1992.\footnote{Dafoe, 47.} \footnote{Blankenhorn, 69.} Then, vice-president, Dan Quayle commented on this particular show because of its negative message that implied that fathers were unimportant to the family. As the result, National contention exploded.\footnote{Blankenhorn, 69.} Society does not wish to be informed or reminded of the negative outcomes children may encounter in single-parent family homes.\footnote{Dafoe, 47.} Family diversity is thought of as the wave of the future.
In addition, the media has put major focus on entertainment artists who have also made the decision to forego marriage and to raise their children alone. "Actrist/singer, Madonna, gave birth to a 6 lbs 9 oz daughter in October of 1996. The baby’s father is Madonna’s personal trainer, Carlos Leon. Early in her pregnancy, Madonna issued a statement to the press that she and “the father of her baby will not be getting married.” This is definitely not a positive example for her teenage fans.

Interestingly, Jonathan Alter published a letter he had written to Madonna advising her to marry the father of her child and to take note of the message she is sending her teenage fans. Excerpts from the letter are as follows:

“You’ve implied that you are prepared to raise your baby alone. Part of your message seems to be that you don’t need men... You fancy yourself a bit of an intellectual. So why haven’t you absorbed more about the cases of American social pathology? The research is quite definitive, actually. The most accurate predictor for whether a child will drop out of school, face unemployment and commit crime is growing up in a single-parent family. Its the only killer correlation. Obviously there are millions of exceptions, and your child—born with plenty of advantages—may be one of them. Material Girls can provide. But what’s freedom for the rich like you can spell disaster for the disadvantaged. How about all of those teenagers who even today who want to dress like you...be like you?" What are your signals to them?"

Alters went on to say:

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45Alter, 51.

46Alter, 51.
“For all its flaws, marriage continues to be the pathway to responsible fatherhood. We’re talking about taming men... socializing them so they don’t wreck the culture. The bond itself is more than a piece of paper. It is a measure of commitment necessary to properly shepherd children toward adulthood. The fact that any of this has to be explained is a sign of how much American values have changed....”

Also, actress, Michelle Pfeiffer commented on her contemplation to have a child without the father:

“I thought about all my options, and certainly one of these options was to just have a baby with somebody, which I guess is the obvious option. But when it came right down to it, I just couldn’t do it. I thought, I don’t want some guy in my life forever who’s going to be driving me nuts.”

On some of the prime-time television programs that show intact families, the father may be portrayed as an “amicable bumbler” who tends to make a fool of himself in the eyes of his wife and his children. This is quite different from the father depicted in the “Father Knows Best” sitcom several decades ago. But, contrary to popular belief that the presence of the father is unnecessary, evidence has shown that the presence of the father is needed beyond the process of conception. He has a distinct role in assisting the mother with the development of the child. The mother’s role appears to be greater and more pronounced than that of the father’s by reason of the fact that she is the primary caretaker of the child,

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47 Blankenhorn, 76.

48 Blankenhorn, 77
as well as, the “first affective association and relationship that is developed.”

The mother usually spends more time with the child and she is the first to answer
his needs, i.e., when he is hungry, or in need of any positive gratification. On
the other hand, when the child begins the process of individuation and
identification by separating from his mother, an attachment figure needs to be in
place— the best figure being his biological father. For it is the father whose
responsibility is to move the child (particularly his sons) from his world of infant
dependency to the outside world to find the meaning of his maleness. Michael
Lamb describes Sigmund Freud’s theory to address this process.

According to Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical theory of moral
development, a boy, during his early years of life, initially identifies with his
mother. He has a strong attachment to her and takes on her characteristics.
Between the ages 3 to 5 years, he develops an incestuous desire for his mother
and finds that he is actually in competition with his father for his mother’s
affection. The child becomes jealous, with the desire to get rid of the competition
(his father.) This process is called the “Oedipus complex.” In many cases the
father remains in the picture and the child becomes afraid of him. Because of the

49Michael E. Lamb, “The Role of the Father: An Overview”, The Role of the
Father in Child Development ed. Michael E. Lamb (New York: John Wiley & Sons,
1976) 3.

50Lamb, 3.

51Blankenhorn, 90.

52Lamb, 3.
incestuous desires he feels toward his mother, the child will become fearful that his father will avenge him by castration. As a result, he develops what is called castration anxiety. To resolve this problem, the child will restrain his feelings for his mother and began to identify with his father. The logic, here, is that if the boy identifies with his father, then he will not be castrated and his mother will love him as she loves his father. The identification with the father is important in the development of sex-role adoption and also predicts the formation of the superego, which is essential for the development of morality and moral behavior.

The superego, being part of the psyche, is where societal and parental values are located.

In accordance with Freud’s theory, an adolescent male whose parents may have divorced or separated before he reached age 5, may not have had a male figure with whom he could identify. Therefore, he would not have experienced the Oedipus complex, nor the castration anxiety and, as a result, he would have a weaker superego and would be considered to be less moral than an

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53Lamb 3.


55Lamb, 9-10.

adolescent male who actually grew up with his biological father in the home.\textsuperscript{57} According to this, the father’s presence is important and needed to assure his son’s successful separation from his mother to gain independence and to become morally developed.

It appears that Blankenhorn agrees with Freud’s theory in regard to the achievement of male identity. According to him, when the adolescent male separates from his mother, he becomes more of his father’s son. It is with the father that the child obtains identity. The father teaches him how to become a responsible man, how to be a good husband and how to be a good father by observing his actions. In the process, he becomes respectful to women, his mother, and to society. When the adolescent reaches adulthood, he will have developed a positive masculine self-image and will have much more confidence in heterosexual interactions with his female counterpart.” \textsuperscript{58,59}

Interestingly, if the male identification process does not take place, the adolescent is unable to successfully separate from his mother. Thus, he experiences hypermasculinity, which Blankenhorn refers to as “unmanhandled” aggression. As a result, the teenager experiences rage which is directed toward women, against authority figures and against society. \textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{57}Greif, 222.
\textsuperscript{58}Blankenhorn, 30-31.
\textsuperscript{59}Lamb, 114.
\textsuperscript{60}Blankenhorn, 31.
Though the entertainment media, as well as the focus on the real lives of female entertainers suggests that fathers are not needed to raise a child, the presence of the father in the home is more important than many of us realize. It is from a relatively early age that the male child needs a male figure with whom to identify. When the male child is young, he usually imitates the actions of his father, such as watching and imitating him as he shaves in the bathroom.

If the male figure is not there, the child is not properly socialized from a male perspective, which results in rage and the need for the child to prove his masculinity, or to flex his muscles, per se.
IV

*Parent-Adolescent Relationship After Divorce*

When family disruption occurs, the adolescent may react with anger and hostility, which he may direct toward one or both parents.\(^1\) Because of the father's sudden absence from the home, the adolescent may experience feelings of rejection and demonstrate anger toward the father for leaving. F. Philip Rice stated that the adolescent may also show anger towards the father after observing a significant decline in his mother's psychological well being. For example, she may be seen in a continuous depressed state or demonstrating feelings of anxiety. Or, anger may be directed toward his mother out of feelings that she is the blame for the father leaving the home. Obviously, consideration may not be given to the fact that both parents may have mutually made the decision to separate.

In terms of parent-adolescent relationships, they are somewhat different in divorced families than they are in nondivorced families; the greatest difference being within one year of the separation/divorce. Many times, the result of divorce is poor parenting on the part of the custodial parent.\(^2\)

*During the first year, the effects of the impact of divorce on custodial mothers were feelings of anger, depression, rejection and incompetence.*\(^3\)

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\(^{1}\) Rice, 354.

\(^{2}\) Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 252.

\(^{3}\) Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 246.
Hetherington, Cox and Cox also pointed out that as they attempt to cope with the problems that are associated with divorce, custodial parents tend to make less maturity demands of their children than non-divorced families. The lack of maturity demands in a family, according to Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch, is characterized by the lack of clear and reasonable rules set aside as guidelines for the adolescent to follow. There is also less parental control and affection, which causes adolescents to have to fend for themselves. Thus, adolescents from one-parent families have more responsibility, autonomy and self-reliance than those from intact families.

Paul Amato added that custodial mothers are less socially supported and, in addition to being less affectionate, they communicate with their children less than parents of a nondivorced families. It is important to the adjustment of adolescents to maintain a warm and positive relationship with the custodial parent.

During the first two years following divorce or separation, which

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64Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 252


66Rice, 364.

67Amato, 28.

68Buchanan, Maccoby, Dornbusch, 259.
Hetherington, Cox and Cox refer to as the crisis period, custodial mothers also demonstrate inconsistency in discipline. The lack of discipline predicts a lack of control over the children and it has been proved that intact families have more control over their children than single parent families.\textsuperscript{69}

It has also been reported that mothers tend to have difficulty with their sons\textsuperscript{70}. Hetherington, Cox and Cox, and Rice cited poor and inconsistent parenting as the reason for the difficulty.\textsuperscript{71,72} It is possible that the mother tries to be firm in her disciplinarian measures, especially in the absence of the father. But instead, she exhibits negative behavior by becoming more of an authoritarian using negative sanctions and affiliations. It was reported that the negative sanctions and commands issued by the mother are often ignored by the son, which creates a more stressful and conflictual situation. However, it has also been reported that same-sex children fare better with same-sex parents.\textsuperscript{73} There are more problems with opposite sex parental relationships between mother and sons in single parent families than in two parent families. It appears that adolescent males and the relationship with their fathers may be better in single parent

\textsuperscript{69}Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 252.

\textsuperscript{70}Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 246.

\textsuperscript{71}Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 251.

\textsuperscript{72}Rice, 357.

families. Apparently, the adverse effects of divorce are more severe and enduring for males. Because people learn to adapt to problematic situations, after two years, the mother usually learns to be more nurturing to her children. Though, she may still encounter some problems with her sons, the mother-adolescent relationship improves significantly. Yet, the relationship is not as positive as the mother-adolescent relationship in an intact family.\textsuperscript{74}

The father-adolescent relationship in some ways is similar to that of the mother-adolescent relationship. Initially, fathers experience the same problems associated with divorce as the mother, in terms of feelings of anger, depression, and incompetence. As with the mother, fathers tend to make less maturity demands toward their adolescent sons.

Furstenberg and Cherlin revealed that the father is less restrictive, wanting every visit to be a happy occasion and they usually assume a minimal role in the day-to-day supervision and guidance of their children.\textsuperscript{75} Instead they go shopping, attend sports events and dine out frequently during visits, behaving more like other visiting relatives rather than parents.\textsuperscript{76} There are infrequent parent-child relations where the father assists his sons with their homework, or give them advice. Most fathers reported that post divorce interactions with their children seem to be more difficult than they were when they all lived in the same

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{74} Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 252.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{75} Furstenberg, Cherlin, 36.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{76} Furstenberg, Cherlin, 36.}
household. It is also found that, over time, the father-adolescent relationship may diminish. Many times, within two years of the divorce, the father may detach himself from his children due to a moderate to high level of conflict between him and his exspouse. The strife between the father and the mother are, most often, over finances, visitation, childrearing, and intimate relations with others.

In summary, after divorce, it appears that the parent-adolescent relationships change significantly and are different from the parent-adolescent relationships of intact families. Indeed, divorce is a stressful time for all involved. The adolescent endures the stressful situation by directing anger and hostility to one or both parents.

The custodial mother, in her attempt to deal with the situation, exhibits diminishing parenting skills, which tends to give the adolescent more autonomy and more responsibility than adolescents from intact families. In the process, the adolescent receives less communication, the lack of maturity demands, and less affection from his mother. It has been pointed out that in order for the adolescent to successfully adjust to these familial changes, it is important that he receives warmth and affection from the resident parent.

On the other hand, the nonresident father, who assumes a minimal role of

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77Furstenberg, Cherlin, 34.

day-to-day care and supervision tends to act as another relative rather than a parent. He also make less maturity demands toward his sons and tries to make his visits a fun time, doing things and taking his children places to have fun. Over time, possibly because of a conflictual relationship with the custodial mother, the father may become less involved with his children, eventually having no interactions at all.
The Effects of Father Absence

As have been noted, separation and divorce results in many family changes for the adolescent. Some of the changes encountered are the absence or loss of a parent, namely, the biological father. In addition, the child will experience, a considerable decrease in income, which is evidenced by a decreased in the standard of living. The decrease in income is sometime so profound that the mother and her children will fall to or below the level of the poverty line.

Destructive parental conflict in association with parental divorce and separation can be devastating for the adolescent, as well as the custodial parent. Trying to adjust to developmental changes of adolescence, the adolescent’s self esteem may be affected by the absence of his father. And, finally, if the divorced biological parent should remarry, the adolescent may have to adjust to a new form of family structure known as the stepfamily.

The Loss of a Parent

Historically, the term “losing a parent” meant that one of the biological parents met an early demise. Many mothers died during childbirth. As a result, children were expected to lose one, if not both, parents before they reached 15
years of age. But because of the progress of medical technology, the life expectancy for humans has increased considerably. The term “losing a parent” in more contemporary times has taken on a new meaning. In addition to losing a parent to death, many children are losing their parents to divorce, separation and abandonment. According to Furstenberg and Cherlin, an estimated 44 percent of children born between 1970 and 1984 will live in a single-parent family before age sixteen. Moreover, it is estimated that the figure could jump from 44 to 60 percent if the divorce rate continues to soar. Over the course of the century, the rate of losing a parent by death has declined; only to be surpassed by the rising rate of biological parental absence from the home because of divorce.

When the father resides in a separate household, his children have less access to his resources. After the divorce, fathers tend to spend less time with their children. Over time, this may be due to the father’s commitment to new relationships. The decline in paternal visits may also be the result of continuing difficulty they experience with their former spouses when they are trying to build a relationship with their children. To that end, some fathers will eventually

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79 Furstenberg, Cherlin, 8.
80 Blankenhorn, 22.
81 Dafoe, 49.
82 Dafoe, 48.
83 Furstenberg, Cherlin, 11.
84 Blankenhorn, 22.
disengage from their children all together. In turn, the children will feel abandoned and direct their anger toward their father.

**Low Self-Esteem**

Sometimes called the survival of the soul, self-esteem is one’s opinion or impression of the self. “If one’s concept of self corresponds with the ideal self (the way we would like to see ourself) then one’s self-esteem is considered adequate.”

Adolescent males who have fathers who exhibit interest and who consistently interact with them tend to strongly develop self-confidence and self-esteem. On the other hand, boys who are paternally deprived usually have lower self-confidence and self-esteem when compared to those who are not paternally absent. In addition, boys who are paternally deprived tend to encounter problems in their peer relations. This is because they lack “secure masculine orientation.” However, those who lack self-confidence are often rejected by other people and they find it difficult to socialize with and to accept others. It has also been found that adolescents who have low self-esteem and a weak identity tend to develop a false facade in order to socialize. This is done to

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**Footnotes**


87Biller, 113.
compensate for their feelings of worthlessness. According to Rice, an individual whose identities is weak or whose self-esteem is low or have not sufficiently developed may demonstrate emotional problems. Low self-esteem has been found to be a factor is drug abuse.⁸⁸

Adolescents who have low self-esteem are usually self-conscious, and become extremely nervous when they find that they are the center of attraction. They also are vulnerable to criticism--constructive or otherwise, because of their feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy.⁹⁰

According to Rice, there is a close relationship between delinquency and self-concept, and delinquent youth tend to show lower self esteem than nondelinquent youth.⁹⁰ Because of their low self-esteem, adolescents tend to indulge in deviant behavior in an attempt to escape feelings of self-rejection and they will socialize with groups of people who also display deviant behavior to restore their self respect.⁹¹

**Income Deprivation**

When parents separate or divorce, they usually have to support two households--that of the custodial parent and that of the nonresidential parent. In doing so, they forgo the "economies of scale," which is gains from sharing

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⁸⁸Rice, 185.
⁹⁰Rice, 187.
⁹¹Rice, 188.
expenses. The largest expense being that of housing. It is common knowledge that two can live cheaper than one when both individuals combine their income. This holds true in this case.

Normally, intact families pool their resources. For example, a family of four (two parents and two children) would need an income of at least $14,228 to live at the poverty line. If parents live in separate households, and both children live with the mother, the family will need $18,603 to maintain the same standard of living for all members of the family—$11,304 for the mother and the children and $7,299 for the father. The cost to maintain two households above the poverty line is the same regardless of which parent has custody of the children. As you can see, the economies of scale for this family is worth over $4000.

An inevitable disadvantage to divorce is the lost of the father’s income. As much as 50 percent of the household income is loss when the father leaves the home; even more if the mother or custodial parent is unemployed at the time. Dafoe reported that children in single parent families are six times as likely to be

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92 McLanahan, Sandefur, 24
93 McLanahan, Sandefur, 24.
94 McLanahan, Sandefur, 24.
95 McLanahan, Sandefur, 24.
poor and to be economically insecure for long periods of time\textsuperscript{96, 97, 98} than children in two parent families. The national data show that currently divorced women and their children do not regain their predivorce standard of living until five years after the breakup, on average.\textsuperscript{99} Women who were married to men with high earnings typically experience a sharper decline in living standards than women who were already poor, and they recover more slowly.\textsuperscript{100} As a result, women and their children are near or below the poverty line for a long period of time unless the mother remarries. Blankenhorn indicated that the review of evidence by William A. Galston concludes that current research findings suggest that the best anti-poverty program for children is a stable, intact family.\textsuperscript{101}

Because of inadequate income, it may becomes necessary for the custodial parent and their children to relocate. Often, women and their children will take temporary refuge in their parent’s home\textsuperscript{102} At the time of the 1980 census, it was reported that approximately 7 percent of formerly married women with children were living with their parents. Though “doubling up” has economical and

\textsuperscript{96}Dafoe, 47.
\textsuperscript{97}Coontz, 23.
\textsuperscript{98}Furstenberg, Cherlin, 45.
\textsuperscript{99}Furstenberg and Cherlin, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{100}Furstenberg and Cherlin, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{101}Blankenhorn, 49.
\textsuperscript{102}Furstenberg and Cherlin, 55.
psychological advantages, the arrangement can be stressful for all involved.\textsuperscript{103}

When there is a decline in income, it may become necessary for the mother to work longer hours and to take on more than one job. A study revealed that “the proportion of women working 1,000 hours a year or more rose from 51 to 73 percent after a separation and their incomes increased proportionately and “higher rates of both quitting and being laid off in the year after divorce was also reported.\textsuperscript{104} Working longer hours means that the mother spends less time at home with her children giving them more autonomy and more responsibility than children from intact families. If the custodial parent received adequate resources to assist her in the provision of her children, then it may not be necessary that she work considerably long hours that tend to keep her away from home and from her children.

\textbf{Inadequate Child Support System}

In unit II, suboptimal contributions towards the well-being of children was discussed. Suboptimal contributions refers to inadequate provisions for the needs and care of children. When separation or divorce occurs, the economic status of the mother declines approximately 30 percent, while that of the father increases by approximately 15 percent.\textsuperscript{105} Of the total income, the mother and the children

\textsuperscript{103}Furstenberg and Cherlin, 55.

\textsuperscript{104}Furstenberg and Cherlin, 55.

\textsuperscript{105}Furstenberg, Cherlin, 50.
receives less than half, even though there are more members of the household.\textsuperscript{106} The reason for this disparity in the distribution of income is that fathers do not pay sufficient child support. According to Furstenberg and Cherlin, approximately 40 percent of children who are eligible for child support have not been issued an award.\textsuperscript{107} Among those who have an award, 25 percent reported that they had not received one payment that year, and those who did receive payments received less than what was awarded.\textsuperscript{108} Furstenberg and Cherlin quote comments made by Irwin Garfinkel regarding child support system, "...the system is unfair and condones parental irresponsibility."\textsuperscript{109}

Many of these problems are indeed due to a weak child support system, which does condone parental irresponsibility because it does not effectively collect support from nonconforming fathers. Also, the enforcement of child support is weak in that it makes it easier for fathers to avoid their responsibility.

After divorce or separation, the need to relocate not only causes stress for the mother but also for her children. In the case of adolescents, they are at the stage of development where they seek to separate from the parents to form their own identity. They tend to spend more time away from home with their peers. It is with their friends that they find acceptance and a sense of belonging. Although

\textsuperscript{106}McLanahan, Sandefur, 25.
\textsuperscript{107}Furstenberg, Cherlin, 25.
\textsuperscript{108}McLanahan, Sandefur, 50.
\textsuperscript{109}Furstenberg, Cherlin, 51.
they are older than younger children, adolescent need guidance and supervision. Parental guidance and supervision tend to diminish as it becomes necessary for the mother to work longer hours.

When divorce occurs, the need to relocate means to leave their friends, communities and their schools. As they are naturally undergoing emotional changes, the occurrence of family disruption compounds the problem of successful adjustment, creating more stress for the child. Adolescents, especially males, may respond with anger and behavior problems towards their custodial parent and peers.

**Parental Conflict**

Conflict and disagreements are a normal and natural fact of life. It is inevitable that people who interact with one another, such as family members, will experience a certain amount of discord for one reason or another. Therefore, it is impossible to think that a husband and wife will never experience conflict in their relationship. As E. Mark Cummings and Patrick Davies pointed out, if children never observe their parents’ anger and their being upset, then it is possible that they will hold an unrealistic idea about the world and relationships, and will probably be unable to cope with conflicts they are certain to encounter in their own relationships.\(^{110}\) Observance of their parents’ behavior in this aspect, children will become knowledgeable on how to handle their own negative feelings

and also learn conflict resolution. But, as Paul Amato mentioned, parental modeling of verbal and physical aggression, especially from destructively angry homes, may also teach their children that fighting is the suitable manner for settling disagreements.\(^{111}\) However, it is not the conflict and disagreement alone that may cause possible psychological and behavior problems in children, but the frequency, the mode of expression and how the conflict is resolved.

According Cummings and Davies, interparental conflict may vary in terms of frequency, intensity and expression.\(^{112}\) For instance, it was noted above that interparental conflict could more or less be a learning process for children. Yet, increased frequency of marital conflict is associated with increased difficulties in children, such as distress, insecurity and anger and is also associated with increased aggression.\(^{113}\) Therefore, how often a child is exposed to parental conflict should be taken into consideration when assessing its effects.

In terms of the mode of expression of marital conflict, interspousal and nonverbal anger are forms of expressions. Yet interspousal aggression and abuse has been repeatedly associated with development of behavior problem in children.\(^{114}\) Cummings and Davies stated that psychopathology is approximately four times more likely in children of battered women than in children from

\(^{111}\)Amato, 30.

\(^{112}\)Cummings, Davies, 64.

\(^{113}\)Cummings, Davies, 65.

\(^{114}\)Cummings, Davies, 65.
nonviolent homes.\textsuperscript{115} Interspousal aggression adds to the risk of mental health problems in children. Nonverbal anger or the silent treatment is more subtle and is sometimes difficult to detect and remember.\textsuperscript{116}

Interparental arguments that are intense promote anger, shame and concern in children and are more distressing than calm, rational disagreements. Unfortunately, more research is needed to ascertain the level of intensity of what types of anger expressions.

Buchanan, et al reported high levels of deviance and depression in adolescent boys in relation to parental conflict. However, why they are more affected than girls is not clear.\textsuperscript{117}

**Feelings of Being Caught in the Middle**

As mentioned before, adolescents benefit and adjust better to family disruption when they have warm, affectionate and responsive parents. It is also recommended that they should remain in contact with both parents. However, parental conflict can make this difficult for the adolescent, especially if the parents are not on good terms. Buchanan, and associates reported that adolescents who resided in dual residence were strongly affected by interparental conflict in terms of being caught in the middle.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{115}Cummings, Davies, 66

\textsuperscript{116}Cummings, Davies, 66.

\textsuperscript{117}Buchanan, Maccoby, Dornbusch, 257.

\textsuperscript{118}Buchanan, Maccoby, Dornbusch, 258.
Being caught in the middle is to be caught between two parents who are in conflict. Sometimes, children are used by their parents to relay negative messages from one parent to the other. Because of their loyalty to their parents, they are reluctant to say anything derogatory about either parent. When commanded to do so by either parent, they have fear of being rejected or alienated by the other parent.

**Adolescent Adjustment in Stepfamilies**

Approximately five years following divorce, 83 percent of men and 76 percent of women will eventually venture back into holy matrimony. The custodial mother, along with her children will usually enter a new relationship with a new partner, forming a stepfamily. Sometimes, the new partner or stepfather will bring his children from a previous marriage to the newly formed family. These types of families are also referred to as “blended” or “reconstituted” families and are one of the fastest growing family forms. One out of every five households consisting of children under eighteen is a stepfamily.

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119Rice, 357.
120Rice, 365.
121Furstenberg, Cherlin, 77.
122Furstenberg, Cherlin, 78.
In Old English, the prefix “step” meant bereaved orphan. Stepparents were originally considered to replace deceased parents, returning the family to nuclear status. But stepparents as we know them are not replacements for deceased parents, but rather the addition of new parents.

Nearly half of all children who spend any time within a single parent family will eventually become part of a stepparent family through the remarriage of the custodial parent. In addition, children whose mothers remarry while they are relatively young will more than likely experience the disruption of their family more than once. Studies have shown that the probability of divorce in stepfamilies is greater than that of first marriages. Having already experienced divorce, it seems that neither partner is willing to work out their differences in an unhappy marriage.

For custodial mothers, there are, initially, advantages to remarrying. First, with the addition of another wage earner, there is usually a considerable improvement of economical resources. It has been reported that the combined incomes of stepfamilies are almost at the level of the income of two-parent families. For instance, McLanahan and Sandefur, reported that a study conducted

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125 McLanahan, Sandefur, 71.

126 Rice, 365.
by The Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) reported that in 1992, the average income for two-parent families was $61,135; the average income for stepfamilies was $54,594; and the average income for single parent families was $27,065.  

According to this report, it is obvious that the average incomes for two-parent families and stepfamilies are twice that of single-parent families.

Another advantage of remarriage for the custodial mother is the amelioration of household disorganization. The existing custodial parent is significantly relieved of "task overload," which is associated with family disruption. The new partner would be around to help with household tasks, as well as assist in the supervision of the children.

The disadvantage of stepfamilies are numerous. Remarried couples with children on both sides report a high rate of marital conflict and disagreements. These disagreements may be in the areas of dissatisfaction with the spouses parental role, problems with differential treatment of natural children and stepchildren.

The responsibilities in a stepfamily have been found to be somewhat confusing and children are not sure what to expect from stepparents and do not consider them as real parents. On the other hand, stepparents view their responsibilities are complex and difficult. They have reported difficulty in

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127 McLanahan, Sandefur, 81.
128 Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 244.
129 Francke, 184.
disciplining the stepchildren, as well as difficulty in showing affection toward them. Rice reported that "being a stepparent is far more difficult than being a natural parent, because children have trouble accepting a substitute parent." Also, stepparents have difficulty dealing with children that have been previously socialized by their biological parents. Attempts to make changes in the child could prove very unrewarding.

Children, especially adolescents, are use to the existing status quo, in terms of family culture, values, rules and routines, and perceive stepfamilies as an imposition to have to change for the sake of the new family. Furstenberg and Cherlin demonstrate Jamie Kesher's example of the difficulty members of stepfamilies encounter when they attempt to work and mutually accept concepts of family:

Kesher provides the example of a stepfather who arrives home to find the house a mess. His wife is in the kitchen preparing dinner while her son is nearby reading a book. He may be inclined to ask the child to help out but is unsure how his wife will react to such a request. She may, Kesher points out, feel angry because she believes that helping out isn't her son's role; or she may interpret her husband's request for participation as a criticism of her housework. Such a scene is less likely to occur in a nuclear family because the couple would have developed over time a common concept of how the family should operate.

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130 Rice, 367.
131 Rice, 368.
132 Furstenberg, Cherlin, 84.
Adolescent stepchildren have difficulty accepting their new stepfather or stepmother because of jealousy. They usually have problems seeing their biological parent spending more time with their new spouse and their stepsiblings. Also, they may have a certain amount of loyalty toward their nonresident parent and see the stepparent as an intruder or an impediment to their biological parents’ possible reunion.
VI

Conclusion

One of the signs of the changing times is the decline of the traditional American family. Many children are going to bed at night in homes without their fathers. The prominent family structure is no longer the intact family, but the single-parent family, as well as the ever increasing number of stepfamilies. Most single-parent families are headed by the mother, although father-headed families are on the rise.

The values of society has changed significantly in terms of the family and its views on divorce. Approximately 30 years ago, such issues as divorce and premarital sex was viewed by society as morally wrong. Today, even the process of divorce has become a part of life and the laws are making it easier for couples to dissolve the marital contract. Now, before people consider marriage, they also consider the possibility of becoming divorced.

The importance of fatherhood seems to have diminished in the eyes of society. It appears that the entertainment media is sending subtle messages that fathers are no longer necessary for a family to raise their children. But the father’s presence in the family is just as important as the mothers. Paternally deprived children face numerous developmental problems, such as not having a biological father figure with whom to identify, low self-concept and low-self esteem. The adolescent male experience further problems of not having a positive masculine
self-image in order to interact with his female counterpart. He also experiences
hypermasculinity when he is not properly socialized from a male’s perspective.
This causes him to try to prove his masculinity by being aggressive and, in some
cases, violent. Adolescents from single-parent families are more likely to
experience this than adolescents from intact families.

Father absence affects adolescents in terms of lowering their standard of
living because of income deprivation. It is possible for the family’s income to
decrease as much as 50 percent when the father leaves the home, many times
plunging the family below the poverty line. The lack of the father’s resources may
cause the child and their family to have to relocate, possibly to unsafe or
inadequate neighborhoods. It also puts the child in a situation that he may not
have the proper supervision and guidance due to the necessity of the custodial
parent to work longer hours and to frequently be away from home.

Third party reinforcement is often pursued, such as the child support
system. Unfortunately, many children do not receive child support awards
because of a weak system that allows for inadequate payments to the custodial
parent and their children, and allows deadbeat dads to get away without taking
care of their obligations to their children.

Parent-child relationships become very different when separation and
divorce occurs. The adolescent receives less maturity demands from the custodial
and nonresident parents. There is little or no communication and the relationships
tend to lack affection. Adolescents under these conditions tend to fend for
themselves and usually have more autonomy than adolescents from two parent families. Often they make decisions they are not ready or prepared to make.

Parental conflict is a part of single-parent families, as well as intact families. However, many families breakup in order stop parental fighting. But conflict can continue years after divorce. Children become increasingly aggressive when frequently exposed to high conflict situations involving their parents. Children in high-conflict families are more susceptible to behavior problems and to increase psychopathology.

In order for adolescents to adjust to family disruptions, they should have warm and affectionate interactions with both parents. However, this can cause the child to be come caught in the middle of parental conflict, creating sadness and depression in the child.

Finally, children from single-parent families may eventually become part of a stepfamily. It has been reported that five years after divorce, many custodial mothers will remarry. The remarriage initially is beneficial for the mother, but causes problems for the adolescent. Stepparents are usually not easily accepted by children because they do not see them as real parents. On the other hand stepparents find it difficult to discipline stepchildren and have also reported that they are difficult to love.

Unfortunately, children of stepfamilies may experience the break up of a the family a second time. This is because stepfamilies are more likely to become divorced than first marriages. Therefore many children of stepfamilies will relive the nightmare of family disruption.
It is obvious that children from intact families have a better chance at life than those of single-parent families. Both parents are mutually concerned about the outcome of their children’s lives. When there is only one parent in the family, children are at a disadvantage in terms of adequate income and emotional well being.

Because of the disadvantages for children of divorced families, people are not going to stop becoming divorced from their children’s biological parents. In some cases, divorce is necessary to relieve children and spouses from dangerous and mentally unhealthy situations. It is also not likely that people are going to cease from achieving their individual needs for happiness, and women are not going to wake up tomorrow and decide to quit their jobs to become full time mothers in the home. For most of them, this would be an unrealistic decision to make. To that end, it appears that we will have to accept the fact that divorce is woven into the fabric of the American society, and is more than likely here to stay. As for the sake of the children, perhaps they will come to adapt to changing times and changing families forms, and some how become efficiently socialized to become highly regarded moral citizens of tomorrow.
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