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Daughters Of Divorce

Stéphanie Strauss

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Sociology

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montréal, Québec, Canada

October 1992

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## ABSTRACT

### Daughters of Divorce

Stéphanie Strauss

The study examines adult daughters of divorce whose mothers had sole custody. The purpose of this research is to find out how daughters have adapted to their parents' divorce, twenty years after the event, and the sorts of factors that have contributed to their varying types of adaptation. The sample consisted of 20 women, ages between 20-26.

The results indicate that daughters' adjustment varies considerably from those who were delighted at the divorce, still are, and apparently benefited from the change to those who are still traumatized, sad and bitter, and report serious negative consequences. Levels and types of adjustment vary depending upon a wide range of factors, the most important ones being the level of parental conflict, the emotional health of the mother, and later, the availability of the father. The data also reveal that most daughters have little contact with their nonresidential parent, and this increases when remarriages occur. Negative effects are the greatest with multiple marital transitions. And negative effects are lower if the mother restores a stable environment, maintains a good relationship with the ex-husband and he with the daughter, and if the daughter receives support by both her parents, other family members and friends. The pattern of results indicate that the key to counteracting many of the negative effects of divorce is the availability of support systems for both parents and children, ongoing paternal involvement and friendly coparenting.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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It isn't easy to live with someone who is having an affair with a thesis in progress. Daniel Valois managed to do so with grace, support and good humour. That I have come to expect his support is the reason I am grateful.

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## Introduction

Today, there are more children than ever who are products of divorce and who, two decades later, still experience difficulty talking about it (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Berman, 1990). Therefore, I felt it would be useful as well as interesting to research this topic, knowing full well that there would be problems in the execution.

Every year, tens of thousands of couples in Canada are divorced. In 1990, 78,152 divorces were granted in Canada (Canadian Centre for Health Information, 1992). Close to 60% of divorcing couples in Canada have children under 16 years of age; a total sum of 30,000 children are involved in divorce each year (Atkins and Rubin, 1986). In 1990, 31,620 children were involved in divorces: 25,602 went to the mother, 3,504 went to a joint custody, 2,460 went to the father and 54 went to orphanages (Canadian Centre for Health Information, 1992). And according to the projections of the American Centre for Health Statistics one out of two marriages will end in divorce (Ahrons and Rodgers, 1987). In 1990, 1,175,000 American couples were divorced, and 1,045,750 American children were involved in these divorces (National Centre for Health Statistics; S. McLanahan and L. Bumpass, University of Wisconsin).

In addition, wives and mothers of young children are now more likely to be in the labour force, thereby redefining the roles of males and females, adult and children. Families have undergone numerous internal changes. It can be said that marriage today has become a voluntary union rather than an automatic one, nor is it seen as a lifelong commitment as it once was. The prevalence of divorce affects in a fundamental sense all families, whether or not they experience divorce

themselves. Moreover, the decision for couples to have children has now become a conscious one rather than an automatic consequence of fertility (Eichler, 1988). Over the past 20 years the proportion of people who marry three or more times increased from 4% to 8% of the total (Atkins and Rubins, 1986). These radical changes in traditional family structure lead to a number of different alternatives, all of which have implications for fathers, mothers, children, families and the society at large.

This research focuses on one type of family, the divorced one. But more specifically, with adult daughters of divorce whose mothers had sole custody. The research concentrates on familial interactions from the perspectives of these daughters. The basic premise of the research is that the effects of divorce on daughters, and sons also presumably, depends upon a large number of factors. These will no doubt vary in significance from one individual to another, but all include the following: The relationship between the ex-spouses (level of conflict), the emotional health of the custodial parent, the quality and frequency of the relationship with the non-custodial parent, the child's understanding of the break-up, the economic condition or standard of living of the child and the custodial parent and remarriages (and all they entail).

By interviewing, I seek to clarify the variables and their personal significance i.e., to find out who was most affected by what, positively and/or negatively. Also, by reviewing the literature, I hope to clarify the results of others' research and particularly their own theories of the effects of divorce.

The research is organized in the following manner: Chapter 1 deals with family ideology, change, and theory, Chapter 2 reviews the literature of divorce and Chapter 3 explains the methodology. The data are analyzed in three chapters. They are Chapter 4: "Before the Divorce", Chapter 5: "After the divorce", and Chapter 6: "Today". Chapter 4 deals with the following: situation and/or problems in the home; recollections of "mom" and "dad": their relations and emotional state; and relations between parents and children. Chapter 5 focuses on: responsibility and/or guilt; changes and/or difficulties; the availability of the father; and the relations between parents and children. And Chapter 6 touches upon: coping mechanisms and their utility; remarriages; and the relations between parents and children.

I have chosen to research adult daughters of divorce whose mothers' had sole custody for three reasons. First, I am a product of this kind of legal separation from which I suffered a great deal, underwent therapy and finally, healed. Second, because it is still today the modal type of custody settlement; about 86% of Canadian and 90% of American custody awards are made in favour of the mother (Anderson et al., 1988). And third and most importantly, because recent studies (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1989; Berman, 1991) show that many children of divorce who are now adults two decades later, still have great difficulty discussing their parents' divorce.

The newly created centres such as "Le Centre Mitoyen" located in Old Montreal, and other similar ones which have been established in Laval and in Quebec City do not even come close to meeting the demand. This is a clear indication of the large number of children, young and

old, who experience problems in coping with their parents' divorce and who require some form of outside help. Whether children of divorce describe their parents' marital dissolution as having deeply affected them or as having been the best thing for them, divorce is never an easy situation for the children nor the parents.

The purpose of this research is to find out how daughters have adapted to their parents' divorce, twenty years after the event, and the sorts of factors that have contributed to their varying types of adaptation. Symbolic Interactionism is the theoretical framework utilized to analyze the data; and interviewing is the chosen method of research: 20 women were interviewed on a series of questions dealing with familial interactions in three different time frames: before the divorce, after the divorce and today. This is a small and fairly homogeneous sample, so the results cannot be generalized to the total population of adult daughters of divorce; also, the divorce rates 20 years ago were lower and the trauma perhaps correspondingly higher. Nonetheless, these results can shed some light on what factors actually amplify or dampen the impact of divorce, and thereby aid in understanding and perhaps helping children of divorce in their time of need, through their moment of transition and through all the changes their parents' divorce elicits.

## CHAPTER 1

### FAMILY IDEOLOGY, THEORY AND CHANGES

#### Ideology of Familialism

Chapter One will deal with a variety of issues concerning families. The first section will briefly discuss the widespread ideology of Familialism. The second section will focus on the increased divorce rates, and the third section will look at the theoretical framework utilized in this study: Symbolic Interactionism.

The Canadian census defines the family as:

"A husband and a wife (with or without children who have never married), or a lone parent of any marital status, with one or more children who have never been married, living in the same dwelling, and for census purposes, common-law couples are considered married, regardless of their legal status..." (Baker, 1990,4).

The family is a slippery concept to define, in part because it can be discussed in terms of individuals, families or societies (Troll, 1969,22). Despite changing theories of the family, every theory of the family implies a set of assumptions about human nature and society. Indeed, many of the social theories of the family were both normative and prescriptive, linked to concepts of both norms and social health. Thus, some mainstream theories argued that in effect, family forms which provided appropriate differentiation of roles and obligations produced mentally healthy and/or "normal" individuals, while other family forms which did not, produced "sick" and/or "abnormal" individuals (Skolnick, 1987,84).

For a large part of the 20th century, ideas based upon the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud have been central to the concepts of healthy individuals, the families that produce them, and the

societies they form (Hayford, 1988,14). Such theories are simply inadequate during times of social change. It is precisely because we are living in such a time that many mainstream theories of the family have become increasingly outdated. Experience tells us that many people survive family disruptions without becoming mentally unhealthy nor "deviant" individuals. Children whose mothers work or fathers stay home can become happy, healthy individuals. Theories which see only one kind of family as being healthy clearly do not describe our real experiences, but reflect the theorist's beliefs and ideologies.

One of the reasons why discussions on the family are so heated is simply because there is little consensus existing on what the family actually is. As Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh (1982) have shown, to understand "the family", one must differentiate between ideology and reality: the actual ways in which people interact, co-reside, have sexual relations, babies, marry, divorce, raise children and so on.

The most widespread and deeply embedded ideology about "the family" (and how people ought to live) is known by some as familialism, is called by others the traditional perspective and/or nuclear family, and has more recently been named the "monolithic structure" by sociologist Margrit Eichler. The ideology of familialism is the belief that nuclear families are the best way for adults to live; that is, as a socially and legally recognized heterosexual couple (a man and a woman) who normally expect to have children (Luxton, 1980,25). According to this ideology, being raised in such a family is the ideal way, for the nuclear family is thought to provide the most stable, intimate, loving environment possible (Spock, 1968).

Today, we are all very well aware that families (including nuclear ones) do not necessarily provide the safe haven familial ideology maintains. The prevalence of violence against women and children committed in the home is a testimony to this. This ideology maintains that the more people live in ways which deviate from this idealized model, the less likely they are to get intimacy, love, stability, and thus the more likely they are to be in some way socially unstable or "deviant".

Basic to this model, which mirrors much of the sociology of the family literature, are patriarchal definitions and ideals of how men, women and children should behave. Eichler refers to these as sexist and conservative biases. While men are primarily defined by their occupation, women and children are defined by their relation to the kinship system, hence through men (Gittens, 1985,35). This ideology about the way we should live has profoundly shaped our lives and has affected the assumptions of what people should and should not do, about what is right and what is wrong.

But more importantly, as Margrit Eichler clearly illustrated in her book: Families in Canada Today, the ideology of familialism, has shaped social policy and government legislation for much of the 20th century. She provides various examples such as income tax laws, which are biased and discriminatory against women and certain family structures. By definition, "the family" has referred to the authority of the male head over his wife and children; thereby, the nuclear family implies male power over women and children, and wives' subordination to their husbands.

However, the prevailing ideology of familialism and/or the concept of "the nuclear family" has recently become a centre of major controversy. One major problem with the concept of the traditional family is that it does not represent reality, either historical or current (Hood, 1986, 349-351). It has been a powerful social ideal, but it has never been an ideal that was shared throughout society, and it has never been economically possible for everyone. The traditional family, even in the 19th century, was something that only some people could attain. In Canada, it was basically a privilege of the white middle-class people. The economic base that would be necessary for the establishment and maintenance of such families has never been more than partially developed, and today is attainable only for a small minority of families (Gingrich, 1984, 17).

But families in our society still show the influence of the traditional ideal (familialism). For example, male and female roles are for the most part differentiated: women cook, men take the garbage out; we buy dolls for girls and hockey sticks for boys; and still most men in the labour force earn more than most women. Certain government policies, such as income tax laws, benefit men more than women and some family structures over others.

It is also assumed that men and women have different emotional roles. Women are viewed as the ones who are responsible for taking care of children, writing letters to family members, fixing holiday meals and so forth. These different emotional roles affect economic roles; women are more likely than men to work part-time, or give up their job in order to accommodate a move or a transfer, for example. The structures



of families are presently undergoing profound changes. The traditional ideal of "the family" is slowly but surely being recognized for what it is, i.e. an ideal; for reality has been its (familialism) strongest challenge.

Yet this realization cannot occur overnight, since most of the sociological family literature from the past 50 years in North America has presented the nuclear family as both the ideal and the statistical norm. Individuals do not easily let go of norms and beliefs and do not always react or adapt quickly to change. Perhaps the supposition can be made, from a Durkheimian point of view, that individuals today find themselves in a state of "anomie" resulting from the changes the Canadian families are experiencing, which vary from the demographic to the economical, the ideological, the legal, the theoretical, the social and the structural.

Consider the following. Couples today have a later mean age of marriage. Common-law relationships have increased. The number of children per families has decreased. One-parent families have increased. The number of blended families with more children from previous relationships has increased. The divorce rates are higher. There are more individuals who remain single: about 10% of Canadians never marry. More Canadian adults live alone: in 1986 21% of all private households contained only 1 person. The number of childless couples has increased: about 15% of married couples never produce children. More women with children are entering the labour force. And yet, most research on families has focused on nuclear families (Statistics Canada, 1987).

Margrit Eichler has suggested that the nuclear family, as it has been presented in sociological research, was merely an idealized version of reality which never did exist for many Canadians." There has never been one type of family, but North American sociologists have not made enough efforts up till now to delineate the variety of family structures" (Eichler, 1983,9-10).

As a result of the large number of changes, there seems to be an increasing awareness of the fact that the nuclear family with mother at home and father at work is becoming both a minority phenomenon and a statistical rarity. In March of 1983, 6.2% of American families fitted this description (Skolnick, 1987,2).

Recently, the ideology of familialism has been challenged by the revelation that the nuclear family is often not the centre of love and security its proponents claim. For instance, one of the most prevalent myths about "the family" is that young children are best raised exclusively by their biological parents and that other ways of raising children, such as in group day care or with a step-parent, are only second best. Yet, there is no evidence to support this myth at all (Luxton, 1988,240).

Similarly, the ideal that women will find great pleasure and satisfaction as wives and mothers has been undermined by women articulating needs for additional sources of self-worth (Friedan, 1963), and it is overtly contradicted by the evidence of violence against women in the home and by women's persistent economic vulnerability. Moreover, the feminist movement has played collectively a key role in revealing the differences between ideology of the ideal family and the lived

reality of daily life (Luxton & Rosenberg, 1986, 10-11). These challenges, along with the many changes which have taken place in our society, have clearly undermined both the concept of "the family" and the ideology of familialism.

#### Increased divorce rates

In the past few decades, the structures of Canadian families have changed considerably. The most important ones are drastic changes in demographic patterns, in particular greatly reduced fertility and greatly increased longevity, the industrialization of housework, increased labour force participation of women, and the increased divorce rates.

In Canada, the divorce rate has been increasing steadily. Over recent decades, it rose from a rate of 39.1 (per 100,000 persons) in 1960, representing 6,980 divorces that year, to a rate of 244.4 in 1985, representing 61,980 divorces (Anderson et al., 1988,65).

The divorce law came into being in 1968, and with it came an enormous jump in the Canadian rates from 54.8 per 100,000 persons in 1968 to 124.3 in 1969 (McKie, Prentice, and Reed, 1983,59). This jump in the Canadian divorce rate suggests that rather than to remain in marriages that have already broken down, people took advantage of the fact that the 1968 Federal Divorce Act made divorce a great deal easier to obtain. By the late 70's, experts were predicting that some 40% of all Canadian marriages would end in divorce (McKie, Prentice and Reed, 1983,60); this was based on the assumption that divorce rates would remain steady.

However, by the mid-80's, there was another jump in the divorce rate; it reached a peak of 285.9 per 100,000 people in 1982, but by 1985, it had gone down to 244.4 (Vital Statistics 1985, Table 10). Shortly after, a second major change in the divorce law of 1986 (which rendered the waiting period for obtaining a divorce on the basis of marriage breakdown much shorter, reducing it from three to one year) brought along a sharp increase in the divorce rate, which jumped from 244.4 in 1985 to 308.3 in 1986 (Statistics Canada, 1986, Table 9.1).

Whenever more liberal laws are introduced, divorce rates increase; however, they also vary from region to region. There are many effects brought by high divorce rates, all of which are drastically different for children, mothers, fathers, and family structures. In 1985, 30% of all marriages contracted in that year involved at least one previously married partner, compared to 12% of all marriages in 1967. A study by Anne-Marie Ambert (1984) reveals that three-fourths of divorced men and two-thirds of divorced women remarry. This not only means that remarriage rates are increasing, but also that a substantial number of children grow up in reconstituted families. But many children remain with single parents: in 1981, 11.3% of all families were headed by a single parent, of which 82.6% had been married (Nett, 1986, 22).

As divorce rates increase, so does the number of children involved: between 1969 to 1985, the number of dependent children involved in divorce per year rose from 20,230 to 61,980, for a cumulative total of 835,719 dependent children involved in divorce (Eichler, 1988, 241). It has been estimated that in the United States (where divorce rates are higher than in Canada), children born in the

mid-70's have about 45 chances in 100 of living in one-parent families for at least one year before they reach the age of 18. And one-tenth of the children were living with a parent and a step-parent by 1977 (Eichler, 1988,241). According to a study conducted by Paul C. Glick, this is estimated to reach 50% by 1990 (1979,176). And another estimate reveals that in American children born in 1990, only 40% will reside with both of their biological parents (Weitzman, 1985,xvii). Overall, there is in Canada approximately one in three chances of a marriage ending in divorce. The median proportion of divorces involving no dependent children was 45.4% between 1969 & 1986, meaning that close to 55% of all divorces involved dependent children (Statistics Canada, 1986e, Table 7.6).

The overall effects divorce has on children will be discussed in the following chapter. There are many reasons why divorce is important, but two stand out: its frequency has radically altered the meaning and structure of marriage by making it a more voluntary union. In other words, divorce is no longer unthinkable, and people are more likely to know of individuals who have been divorced. Therefore, attitudes and beliefs about divorce have been modified, and so today when marriages turn sour, people think of divorce as a possible solution to their problem. All of this functions (when children are involved) as an avenue to one parent families and/or reconstituted families.

Many societal factors have contributed to the high rates of divorce: the "me" generation of the 70's (emphasizing enjoyment, personal freedom and self-fulfilment); the religious sphere drastically losing its influence in family matters; the industrialization of

housework offering alternative lifestyles; effective birth control methods; massive entry of women in the labour force; more lenient divorce laws; economic independence for women; a dramatic shift in the acceptance of divorce as a fact of life (Baker, 1990,194-95) and an increase in longevity which propelled some women to decide to spend the remainder of their life without their spouse.

Moreover, there are also personal factors contributing to the high rates of divorce: brief acquaintance before marriage; early age at time of marriage; alcoholism; physical and emotional abuse; emotional problems; lack of communication; discrepancies of social classes, education, and age. Although the divorce rate remains high, most Canadians marry, including those who divorced before. So, a high divorce rate is not necessarily a sign indicating the end of the marriage institution; rather, it reflects changing times and attitudes. "What has happened is that expectations as to what are tolerable levels of discord and unhappiness have changed" (Eichler, 1988,60). Individuals who no longer find their marriage satisfying will contemplate divorce as a solution to their predicament. Others will contemplate new alternatives to marriage, such as unmarried cohabitation, or single living.

#### The Theory of Symbolic Interactionism

All studies in social science are based on certain underlying beliefs about how society is organized, what motivates human beings, which behaviours are biologically based and what is the best way to discover patterns in human behaviour. Some of the more popular perspectives or conceptual frameworks from which to study the family are structural functionalism, the systems approach, the developmental

approach, the conflict or political economy approach, the exchange theory, the feminist perspective, the symbolic interactionism perspective and role theory. Although these theoretical perspectives have all contributed to the enrichment of family studies in one way or another, they have also caused rifts among social scientists. For some people, accepting one perspective implies that others are rejected. Thus, in order to avoid criticism (on the one hand) and because of all the different family structures existing today, many family authors, such as Maureen Baker and Margrit Eichler, have chosen an eclectic or multi-dimensional approach when studying the family.

Yet, depending on a researcher's field of study, methodology, time and resources, some theories are more applicable than others and simply aim at the heart of one's research. It is precisely because of what I am researching, i.e. adult daughters of divorce, and because of what I am interested in, i.e. understanding why for some their parents' break-up was so painful while others appear not to have been negatively affected, hence understanding their definition of their situation, that I have chosen the symbolic interactionist perspective.

The Symbolic Interactionists argue that families or any other aspect of social life cannot be understood as abstractions. Social reality, they insist, is to be found in the behaviour of particular people interacting in particular social settings. In other words, how people define and interpret reality and/or their situation affects their behaviour. This process of interpretation, which can be aided by both verbal or non-verbal cues, gives us information about individuals enabling us to gain insight and understanding (Thomas, 1931,45).

One of the primary defining agencies is the family. Within this framework, the family is studied as a small group in which each individual influences all others. This approach assumes that we are all "actors" who play a part in dealing with social reality (Goffman, 1959). People not only modify their behaviour depending on how others react to them, but they can also influence and/or change the behaviour of others (Blumer, 1969). The term "symbolic interaction" refers to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction that takes place between individuals. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings define each other's actions rather than simply reacting to them.

"Their response is not made directly to the actions of one another, but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to some actions; thus human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions" (Blumer, 1969,97).

George Herbert Mead explained that central to this framework is the recognition that human beings have selves; this implies that individuals make indications to themselves and can therefore act toward themselves as they might act toward others. And this ability of man (to act toward himself), Mead argues, is the central mechanism with which human beings face and deal with their world. Unlike structural functionalism, which assumes (to some extent) that individuals are passive recipients of societal rules and regulations, symbolic interactionism emphasizes the active part of people in their own destiny.

Furthermore, this approach underlines the fact that the observer cannot understand a particular situation unless he or she understands what it means to the individuals involved. I have been involved in



similar situations than the subjects have in this research. It has allowed me to develop successful rapport with subjects, in part due to my ability to empathize with them and their situations.

The symbolic interactionist perspective has been described as being both an explicit and implicit framework for examining the process of adjustment to divorce and remarriage; it is therefore particularly useful, considering my thesis topic. Although symbolic interactionism does not focus on historical or cultural change, it can explain social interaction within families and provide considerable insight into the dynamics of marriage. The work of Charles H. Cooley (1902), George Herbert Mead (1934) and Erving Goffman (1954) has made this approach popular in both Canada and the United States, and has formed the bases of research on topics such as childhood, socialization, and marital adjustment.

Some sociological perspectives emphasize structural changes in society and families, others focus on gender differences, and some emphasize interpersonal relations. The latter is where my interest lies. It is because I choose to study the family from the point of view of the individual rather than society, and for its focus on the human being and on how he acts with his self, towards others, and how he interprets others and their actions, that a symbolic interactionist framework was chosen. Although changes abound, families remain central in most people's life, and they continue to play a key role in our social existence.

The symbolic interactionist perspective provides me with a useful framework from which to analyze my data. The fixed set of open-ended

questions focuses on concepts which have been taken from this perspective. One of the questions which operationalizes the variable "level of conflict", deals with the subjects' "definitions of the situations" existing in their home before, after the divorce, and today. As W.I. Thomas noted, "a person who defines a situation as real is real in its consequences" (Thomas, 1931).

Another set of questions pertains to the "significant others" (Mead, 1934) and focuses on the relationships the subjects have had with their parents before, after the divorce, and today. George Herbert Mead clearly explained that it is through interaction with, for example, parents or "significant others" that a person develops a sense of competency and self, one which reflects the attitudes of others towards oneself. This perspective enables me to focus on "the meanings that subjects have attached to some action" (Blumer, 1969). For example, father's unavailability or diminishing visits mean nothing by itself. However, subjects attach feelings of unworthiness and abandonment to these actions, and that interpretation becomes meaningful. Also, both verbal and non-verbal cues are examined through questions which measure factors such as parents' emotional state, subjects' awareness of problems before, after the divorce, and today, as well as the interviewer's own observations. Erving Goffman suggested that the expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give impressions) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity:

"The expression that he gives, and the expression he gives off. The first involves verbal symbols...this is communication in the traditional and narrow sense, and the other involves a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor" (1959,171-72).

Some questions which deal with the issue of divided loyalties and the complexities of visits revealed that it was common for subjects to feel they had no choice but to put on an act at their fathers' household and another at their mothers, so as to not displease either parent for fear of loosing their love or approval. In fact, subjects put on what Goffman termed "a performance", which describes "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (1959,178). Moreover, symbolic interactionism is also well-suited to my methodology, i.e. in-depth interviewing. Language is, after all, the chief avenue for symbolic thought. It is through ideas that we make mental representations of the world around us, and thus view the world from this perspective.

One of the major criticisms of symbolic interactionism has been its focus on what happens within families rather than on tracing connections to the wider society. This is a rather subjective call, for what a researcher decides to examine depends on his or her goal and area of interest. This research, for example, focuses on what happens within the interior of families, and not on the structures which surround it. Moreover, Ernest Burgess and Harvey Locke (1953,7-8) described the family as having passed from "institution to companionship". This phrase was meant to indicate that the interior of family life was becoming the most important area for research. It is argued that because of this oversight, this perspective fails to give explicit consideration to the

effects of social class. Similarly, I fail to do the same, since my sample is homogenous, for all the subjects come from the same social class.

In sum, the symbolic interactionists emphasize that social reality is found in the understandings of particular people interacting in a particular social setting. Thus, I am examining, the individuals and their social interaction within the divorced family by interacting with them on the meanings of such an experience (through their recollections and interpretations of the "social setting" of their parent's divorce), in order to discover what factors helped or hindered their post-divorce adjustment.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE OF DIVORCE

#### Early History

Divorce was once defined by many Canadians as sinful, with disastrous effects on children. Up until the late sixties, it was a disgrace: something that did not happen in one's own family. With the exception of Nova Scotia, whose divorce law included cruelty, adultery was the only effective ground for divorce in Canada during the 100 year period between 1867 and 1968 (Peters, 1988,142).

Men were relatively successful at obtaining a divorce on the grounds of their wives' adultery, yet women desiring a divorce on the same grounds had to prove their husbands to be unfaithful, and they also had to prove them guilty of some other aggravation. Indeed, there "existed a double standard which came out of the Victorian belief that a husband's extra marital affairs were a natural occurrence" (Peters, 1988,143). Although this double standard was somewhat modified in 1968, there was another characteristic of early Canadian divorce law, something which clearly shows a double standard (still alive and well) reflecting a social system which set many more substantial barriers to divorce for women than men. While a man could petition for divorce from wherever he lived, a woman had to go to her husband's province of domicile (Peters, 1988,143).

Moreover, because of Canada's legal system, where a central government, ten provinces and two territories fight about their authority and jurisdiction, as well as varying religious and social factors found within each province, many did not have access to divorce

courts until a very late date. For instance, the province of Ontario gained authority to establish its own divorce court in 1930, P.E.I. had its own court in 1945, and Quebec and Newfoundland acquired this right as late as 1968. Although most provincial courts had already moved beyond "adultery only" grounds as a means of getting a divorce, until 1968, this was the only Canadian ground available (Peters, 1988,144).

In Canada, divorce was virtually unheard of before the Second World War. And a year after the divorce grounds were extended, the Canadian divorce rate had already doubled. In 1978, the rate was six times what it was in 1968, and a steady increase persisted as a result of major historical changes (discussed in the previous chapter) and of the new Divorce Act, which came into effect on June 1, 1985.

The Divorce Act of 1968 was significant because it granted divorce for marriage breakdown and marital offense. The following are the legal grounds for marriage breakdown: a) addiction to drugs or alcohol, b) desertion by the petitioner for no less than 5 years, c) separation for no less than 3 years. And grounds for marital offense were a) adultery, b) physical and mental cruelty (Peters, 1988,144). As expected, the number of Canadian divorces jumped from 11,343 in 1968 to 26,093 in 1969.

The increasing divorce rates changed the perceptions of divorce for many Canadians. Since in less than 10 years, divorce became a household word. Although the stigma of divorce remained (especially for women), it was not as pervasive as in earlier decades. Most Canadians had a relative, a friend or an acquaintance that was divorced or divorcing. With the mounting pressures of individuals asking for further

changes in the divorce law, the Divorce Act of 1985 arrived. Just as the 1968 law was a move from archaic to more modern attitudes, this new law better represented society's concern for individuals and their rights. This new law "denounced the adversarial process of divorce and emphasized the rights of individuals to determine their own marital destiny rather than arbiters of the law" (Peters, 1988,150).

The 1985 Divorce Act simplified divorce procedures. Divorce could now be obtained after living separately for a period of one year, and "fault" was not to prejudice the legal proceedings and resolutions (Peters, 1988,151). Two principles of the present age were endorsed by this act: equality and individualism. This act was seen as a social and legal response to changing trends in Canadian society, and it also reflected the actual changes in marriage and divorce practice. Church weddings were losing their religious significance. There were increasing numbers of civil weddings. Couples married at later ages. There were increasing numbers of unmarried cohabitation. Couples waited longer after marriage to have their first children. Methods of birth control were becoming available. An increasing number of women entered the labour force and wished their own identity be kept independent of their husbands. These actual changes in marriage and family life, as well as the societal factors (previously discussed in chapter one), brought about this new divorce law.

Indeed, divorce has become more accessible to people. Marriage breakdown can now be the sole reason for which a divorce can be granted. And a divorce is now given after spouses have been separated for a period of one year. The redefinition of marriage as an economic and

social partnership of equals, rather than as comprising of a male head who is the provider of his family consisting of his dependents, has also added to the mounting pressures aimed at changing the divorce law of 1968. In this partnership, both spouses are seen as equally responsible for the economic well-being of the family, as well as for housework and childcare. The 1985 divorce law reflects this by instituting a 50% division of property in divorce settlements.

However, although the law provided greater accessibility for many individuals, as well as a 50% split for both parties, both social policies and practices have not gone as far as the law, and are still based on the notion of a breadwinner family. For instance, whether or not women have paying jobs, they are still the primary caretakers of children and the home. Despite the 50% split in the division of property, the inequality of income after divorce, whereby ex-husbands experience an increase in their income while ex-wives and children suffer (in general) a major drop in their standard of living, is proof of the problems various family law reforms have not solved (Eichler, 1988, 376).

Divorce has also been redefined. In the 50's and 60's view, divorce was most often perceived as a disastrous event which undermined and destroyed the family. Children of divorce were viewed as "products of broken homes" and were to be pitied (Richardson, 1988, 169). By the early 70's, the focus shifted to a conception of divorce as a possible solution to certain types of problems. Divorce was still seen as "bad" for children, but better than for those living in unhappy marriages. It was not seen as negatively as it had been.



In the 80's, the emphasis was on researching the costs of marriage breakdown, such as the economic, the social, and the emotional (Richardson, 1988,169). Divorce became accepted as a fact of life and recognized as being a part of the social institution of marriage. It was perceived, in the middle and late 80's, as being a positive solution to unhappy marriages. In particular cases, as being beneficial to those involved, including children. It was being put forward that perhaps divorce per se was not problematic for children, but other factors, such as the emotional health of the custodial parent and the level of parental conflict, were (Eichler, 1988,246). Indeed, the middle late 80's has moved from a gloomy, negative and pessimistic view of divorce for everyone concerned to a more bright, positive and optimistic perception of marital dissolution.

In the early 90's, parental conflict, emotional health of the custodial parent, the quality and frequency of contact with the non-custodial parent, the child's own understanding of the break-up, and remarriages are factors which have been found to be detrimental to the adjustment of children of divorce (Baker, 1990,208; Furstenberg, 1990,390). The emphasis of the research on children of divorce in the early nineties is on discovering from children of divorce themselves (especially in the adult stage of their life) how they are making it in life, how they were affected by their parents' divorce and what was helpful or harmful (to them during or after the divorce) and to their adjustment (Berman, 1990,14).

Thus, finding out what factors can help alleviate the negative effects parental divorce has on children is certainly a step in the right direction as far as their recovery and/or post-divorce adjustment.

### The Effects of Divorce on Children

"Long before divorce became common, social commentators worried about the children of broken families and whether family instability would impair their functioning in later life" (Furstenberg, 1990,390). Today, virtually all investigators believe that divorce is usually an extremely stressful and difficult event for children. After all, divorce signifies a transition from living in a two-parent family to living in a single parent family, at least temporarily.

In Canada, divorce is a major cause of lone parenthood; three quarters of all dependent children were given into the custody of the mother, with about 15 to 16 percent given into custody of the father (Eichler, 1988,243). Recently, an American study conducted by Bumpass and Sweet (1989) calculated that 44% of children will live in a single parent household by age 16, often with a major decrease in standard of living. Overall, Lenore Weitzman (1985,xii) found that after divorce, women and minor children experienced a 73% decline in their standard of living, while former husbands experienced a 42% rise in theirs.

In addition, children will have to cope with or react to one parent, usually the father, becoming absent (Furstenberg, 1990,395). This, for some, results in a sense of abandonment (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989; Berman, 1990). Others will have to deal with the awkwardness and tension of having a "weekend" father, while some will cope with occasional phone calls or drop-ins. Recent American

investigations have revealed that most fathers living apart from their children see them infrequently or not at all (Furstenberg et al., 1987,695; Berman, 1990,115).

A minority will experience living with two homes and two diverging lifestyles resulting from joint custody arrangement: 11% of divorced couples with children opt for joint custody (Canadian Centre for Health Information, 1988). An increasing number of youngsters are likely to experience their parents' marrying a second time (Bumpass, 1984; Furstenberg et al., 1987), and also a third time. They will therefore need to deal with recently acquired step-parents, step-siblings, new sets of rules and, at times, an entirely different lifestyle. And still, some will have to cope with an emotionally distraught custodial parent (Baker, 1990,202).

No matter how amicable the separation, divorce is almost always a disruptive and difficult experience for all those involved. Children find themselves caught in their parents' personal and social (however temporary) disorganization and eventual reorganization. It is only recently that these changes and effects are starting to be understood (ibid). But researchers' opinions have fluctuated as to what the effects of divorce are on children (Baker, 1990,203).

Although our logic tells us that the effects divorce has on children should be both easily observable and equally measurable, since they are momentous changes occurring in children's lives, the inconclusive and sometimes contradictory findings obtained by researchers have rather indicated that it is "extremely difficult to generalize about the aftermath of divorce and separation...researchers

in this area have been unable to demonstrate conclusively that children suffer measurable short or long-term detrimental effects" as a direct result of divorce or residing with a single parent (Richardson, 1988,167).

There are several areas of inquiry which researchers in this field investigated. One rather elaborate body of research has demonstrated that a number of children's emotional, cognitive and behavioural problems were a direct result of divorce. Poor school performance, delinquency, low self-esteem, promiscuity and other related emotional difficulties were some examples brought forward (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989; Berman, 1990).

The "father absent" literature is another similar and rather large body of research which suggests that certain consequences occur as a result of children growing up without a father or alternative figure. Difficulties in relating to the member of the opposite sex and emotional and behavioural problems are some of the consequences uncovered by this body of research (Furstenberg, 1990; Berman, 1990).

A third body of research has concentrated its efforts on the economic consequences that follow marital dissolution, and the impact these have on the children and their future life chances (Weitzman, 1985). And, in an attempt to describe experiences and feelings associated with divorce, the more recent research has changed its focus to the individual, in order to better grasp and assess factors involved with this transition (Allison and Furstenberg, 1989; Berman, 1990).

Moreover, there is an other important factor which affects the research on children of divorce, and it is the discipline in which the

research is conducted. For instance, is the research conducted by a sociologist or by a psychiatrist? According to Anne-Marie Ambert, there are two major branches of literature on children of divorce, the sociological and the psychological. The sociological research is a more representative cross-section of divorcing and separating families and paints a less gloomy picture, while the psychiatric usually focuses on divorced people seen by clinicians and representing the more distressed individuals within the population of children of divorce. There are "more substantive methodological problems that have also led to uncertain and contradictory findings" (Richardson, 1988, 168).

For instance, it becomes extraordinarily difficult to sort out what is an effect of divorce per se and what is the result of other factors when determining the effects of divorce on children. After reviewing the literature on children of divorce, "family conflict and/or discord", and "the emotional health of the custodial parent" have been found to have more impact and/or negative effect on children than divorce per se (Eichler, 1988; Glenn and Kramer, 1987).

Another difficulty lies with whether researchers are focusing on short-term effects of divorce on children (such as regression, bed-wetting, discipline problems, truancy, juvenile delinquency) or long-term effects (on children's later adult personality and interpersonal behaviour or skills like an inability to form close relationships, lower self-esteem, or the greater likelihood that they too will become divorced) will also affect their questions, and thereby, their findings. The literature on children of divorce is filled with American studies which assess the impact, both short-term and long-term.

Typically, the following are said to be short-term effects on children who experienced their parents' divorce: intense anger, fear, depression, and guilt (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Hetherington, 1987). Girls tend to feel less negative effects than boys according to some studies (Hetherington, 1987; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). But, other studies have claimed that the hazards of divorce are not greater for boys than for girls, but only different. Boys act out in response to divorce, thereby displaying behavioural problems which are easily observable. Girls, on the other hand, exhibit less socially visible forms of maladjustment, which tend to appear in late adolescence or early adulthood, further complicating the picture (McLanahan and Bumpass, 1988; Allison and Furstenberg, 1989).

Moreover, researchers seem to agree that divorce effects are most evident immediately at the time of separation (Furstenberg, 1990,392). Research that has drawn directly on the experiences of children close to the time of the divorce has provided a consistent picture of the effects divorce has on children (Anderson et al., 1988,171). Further, when researching the impact of divorce, divorcing parents' psychological state is another problematic area; determining which is cause and effect, whether psychotic people are likely to become divorced or divorce makes people more psychotic. On a variety of measures, Joan Kelly's recent research (although follow-up measures taken 2 years later show on average a movement back to normal) has demonstrated that for at least a period of time, many children must cope with "being parented by people who may be borderline of becoming psychotic" (Richardson, 1988,168).

Too many bodies of research, such as the one dealing with outcomes of father absence, arrive at inconclusive results. The assumption that in all intact families, fathers are actively involved in parenting and play a significant role in children's lives has been found to be the exception rather than the norm. Indeed, Christopher Lasch suggests that the father is (in today's modern family) in effect a "tired night visitor". This has been supported by a study revealing that the average father spends only 12 minutes a day interacting with his children (Anderson et al., 1988,170). The assumption that "father absence" is a result of divorce has only added to the inconclusiveness of this body of research; we are all very well aware today that an intact home can experience "father absence". The father can be a work addict, an alcoholic, in need of constant supervised medical care. The possibilities are endless. Yet, since the majority of divorces result in children living with their mother and in many instances rarely seeing their fathers, the focus is understandable. About 75% of dependent children are given into custody of the mother, and most children of divorced families rarely see their fathers (Furstenberg et al., 1987,695).

While some studies have found negative effects for children where fathers were absent, such as low-self esteem (Furstenberg et al., 1987,696; Berman, 1990,122-23), others have not (Berman, 1990,116). And some have found positive effects for children of having their father absent (especially for those children whose fathers were alcoholic, violent, or physically, emotionally, and/or verbally abusive) from the family, while others found that fathers who maintained contact with

their children resulted in positive effects (Eichler, 1988; Berman, 1990).

This does not signify that divorce has no emotional impact on children. The more recent studies relying on accounts of children and adult children of divorce have revealed otherwise. Claire Berman conducted extensive interviews with adult men and women. Their ages ranged from the mid-20's to the mid-60's. She has found that a great majority of adult children of divorce had still, two decades later, great difficulty talking about their parents' divorce. This was in part due to the fact that many carried deep wounds (taking the form of anger, resentment, guilt, feelings of betrayal, abandonment, all usually tied to unresolved issues, conflicts, questions) well into their adult lives. Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee (1989) found that almost half the children in divorced families "entered adulthood as worried, underachieving, self-deprecating and sometimes as angry young men and women". E. Mavis Hetherington suggests that for many children, divorce effects persist well into adulthood. She adds: "We cannot view divorce as an event occurring at a single point in time, for it represents an extended transition in the lives of parents and children" (1989,4).

Similarly, Frank F. Furstenberg Jr. has long been engaged in research on the effects of divorce on children, and he reveals that recent evidence has surfaced suggesting the effects of marital disruption may have been underestimated (1990,393). For instance, evidence suggests that there are consistent differences in educational attainment and family formation by children who grew up in intact and non-intact families. Marital disruption has been associated with school



problems, lower attendance, higher dropout and completion of college leading to a reduction of occupational attainment and income in later life.

McLanahan and Bumpass (1988) have discovered that girls may only exhibit certain effects in late adolescence or early adulthood, further complicating the picture. Zaslow (1987) and Chase-Landale and Hetherington (1989) both conclude that girls not living with their biological fathers may encounter more problems in managing sexuality and adjusting to heterosexual relations. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) recently found, in a follow-up of a small sample of children from divorced families, evidence of a sleeper effect, and that in contrast to the males in their study, females encountered particularly severe problems in establishing emotional commitments in early adulthood. Unstable family life in childhood has also been linked to earlier timing of sexual activity, higher level of premarital pregnancy, earlier marriage, and less marital stability (McLanahan and Bumpass 1988; McLanahan, 1988).

In addition, children of divorce are far more likely to grow up in poverty or with limited economic resources, and hence live in less desirable neighbourhoods, attend poor-quality schools, receive less help when they encounter problems and have more limited contacts for gaining access to desirable higher education and good jobs. "If only because divorce affects the child's economic status, it is likely to shape certain features of the life course" (Furstenberg, 1990,394).

Likewise, Judith Wallerstein and Joan Kelly (1980) studied 60 families with 131 children from the point of separation through a 5 year

follow-up. The study demonstrated that for all children, the effects of divorce persisted long after the actual separation. The research also suggests that divorce has different kinds of impact and evokes different responses in children of different ages; pre-school children are often the ones who are the most confused and affected by divorce (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Emery, 1988).

In sum, the study's most significant contribution was not the expected finding that children are upset and distressed upon their parents' divorce, but was rather its ability to identify what helps or hinders children to adjust to their new situation. Two factors emerged as particularly helpful: easy access to and ongoing relationship with the noncustodial parent, and a postdivorce mother and father relationship in which conflict is virtually non-existent. And in comparison to siblings, the only child tends to feel more threatened (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1979,470).

Margrit Eichler suggests that the lack of clear-cut impact of divorce on children can perhaps indicate that "we have been studying the phenomenon in the wrong manner...it is probably inappropriate to compare children of enduring marriages against children of divorced marriages" (1988,245). She suggests that comparing children of divorced marriages with conflict-ridden marriages might be more appropriate (ibid). Moreover, maybe the focus on the event of divorce rather than on the process which follows it, as well as searching for the absence or presence of negative psychological factors and/or outcomes, have contributed to the inconclusiveness of the data on what effects divorce has on children. Recent research indicates that children of divorce who

were questioned 10, 20, and 30 years after the fact, yielded very different responses than those who were questioned right after their parent's divorce. In their responses, the same problems were described, the same fears expressed (Berman, 1990). Follow-ups such as the one conducted by Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1989) revealed very specific data which was found to be more conclusive and helpful than findings from earlier research.

Overall, there is by now increasing evidence that divorce per se may not be as significant for the children as had been thought. What matters are other factors which tend to be selectively associated with divorce, such as the relationships between both parents (level of conflict), poverty (standard of living), mental health of custodial parent, child's understanding of divorce, the quality and frequency of contact with the non-custodial parent, and remarriages and all they entail.

Indeed, the fact that most children of divorce are about as likely as children in intact families to grow up to be fairly "normal" members of society is testimony to their resiliency, despite the change and disruption brought forth by their parents' divorce.

#### Remarriage Families

As divorce has become commonplace in our society, so has remarriage. Furstenberg and Spanier remark that as recently as 5 years ago, remarriage was virtually ignored by family sociologists, even though divorce received extensive treatment. They go on to say that divorce was regarded as a deviation from accepted marriage practices by family sociologists, and remarriage as a mechanism for restoring family

integrity, " as if broken fragments of an object might be mended in order to return to its ideal form...the point was not to reveal the cracks" (Furstenberg and Spanier, 1984,13). However, remarriage must be considered as the most important path after divorce, since three fourths of divorced men and two thirds of divorced women eventually remarry (Baker, 1990,205). Yet, because remarriage as a large-scale phenomenon is a relatively recent occurrence, research on the remarriage family is extremely scarce. Consequently, there is not a terminology developed to describe the various relationships (particularly for children) occasioned by remarriages.

Still, just as divorce is increasingly being accepted, so is remarriage. Approximately 30% of Canadians marrying in 1985 had a previously married partner. In addition, the number of marriages involving at least one previously married partner has been constantly rising during the last decade (Anderson et al., 1988,159). Likewise, due to the increasing number of individuals divorcing and the lessened social stigma attached to separation and divorce nowadays, the proportion of remarriages will continue to rise (Anderson et al., 1988,159; Eichler, 1988,264).

On a purely statistical basis, a larger proportion of second marriages end in divorce than do first marriages, but the rate does not exceed 50% (Anderson et al., 1988,160). Hence, the statistical data inform us that remarriages are somewhat more vulnerable to divorce than first marriages. And the quality and stability of the second marriage is not necessarily greater than that of the first marriage (Furstenberg and Spanier, 1984,45; Baker, 1990,207). Paul C. Glick found that about 61%

of the men and 54% of the women in their 30's in 1980 may expect to end their second marriage in divorce.

Although the vast majority of divorced persons eventually remarry, men remarry more than women, and divorced men are more likely to wed a woman who has never before been married than a divorced woman to wed a never-married man (Furstenberg and Spanier, 1984,38). Anne-Marie Ambert (1989) found that between remarriages and first marriages, a greater proportion of the former involve a large age discrepancy, since men marry younger women who were never before married.

Research on what are variously called "reconstituted" and/or "remarriage" families has only recently begun to appear. Therefore, the effects on children are not known with any degree of certainty. Considering that more often than not, children of divorce experience having either one or both of their parents remarry, likely acquiring new step-parents and sometimes step-siblings, familial relationships become even more complex. Remarriages often result in a type of discrepancy between parental and spousal roles, at times causing conflict, heated debates and tension. Children find themselves in the middle of such crossfire. Remarriages must have some effect on children, since like divorce, it involves a series of complex changes which can become even more pronounced when either parent remarries a third, or fourth time.

Yet, "disentangling the effects of divorce from the effects of remarriage is an extraordinarily difficult task" (Furstenberg, 1990,395). Some remarriage studies have not studied children's adjustment to divorce, while other studies on the effects of divorce have simply ignored remarriage altogether. Like divorce, the existing

family system is disturbed by remarriage (Eichler, 1988; Hetherington, 1989), but remarriage may divide parents' and children's interests even more than divorce. Evidence to date suggests that remarriages restore women's economic status to what it was prior to the divorce (Duncan and Hoffman, 1985; Spanier and Furstenberg, 1984) and that therefore, parents benefit economically and psychologically from durable remarriages (Parsley and Ihinger-Tallman, 1988).

Although many studies indicate that parents benefit from remarriages, these benefits are less clear-cut for children. While children evidently will experience an improved economic status upon their parents' remarriage, it can also result in a decrease or total disappearance in child support and in visitation from the biological parent. Moreover, the psychological effects of remarriage are even more uncertain (Eichler, 1988; Furstenberg, 1990).

Similarly to divorce, the remarriage literature has produced little consensus as to the consequences, both short-termed and long-termed, of remarriage for children, and how it affects their adjustment. The methodological issues which plagued the interpretation of many studies on the effects of divorce on children resurface in the interpretation of the effects of remarriage on children (Furstenberg, 1990; Baker, 1990). Few studies have examined children's adaptation as they moved from a divorced and/or single-parent family to a reconstituted one with a step-parent household. Most research has relied on comparisons of children in divorced and remarried families, and not on tracing children's transition from one marriage to the next. Only a

very small number of studies have followed children into remarriage (Clingempeel et al., 1984; Hetherington, 1989).

As is the case with divorce, research on remarriage (Zaslow, 1987, Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington, 1989) indicates that it affects children differently depending on their age at the time of the event, their gender and other factors. While some divorce studies found divorce created more problems for boys than for girls (although others stated the opposite), several remarriage studies have demonstrated in contrast, that remarriage creates more problems for girls than for boys (Zaslow, 1987; Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington, 1989). Allison and Furstenberg (1989) both found some evidence which indicated that remarriage may pose greater adjustment problems for girls. Yet, the National Survey of Children was unable to find a strong gender effect among children in remarriages. But, they reveal that gender differences were indeed evident in the way boys and girls responded to marital dissolution.

In spite of the emergent literature on remarriage families, there is still too little information available to identify clearly the effects it has on women, men and children (Eichler, 1990,271). Still, remarriage researchers largely agree that step-families have distinctive features which alter the family process. Remarriage further complicates the situation by introducing additional actors and by expanding the demands on parents. Family priorities need to be realigned. Non-residential parents (more often than not, fathers) are only marginally involved in child-rearing, and frequently withdraw altogether, turning their attention to their second family. Coparenting is extremely rare after divorce. Most ex-spouses do not put aside their

differences for the benefit of their children. Nor do they work together in building their children's future, or share responsibilities pertaining to their children and their well-being (Furstenberg and Spanier, 1984; Eichler, 1988).

Furstenberg's and Spanier's (1984) results showed that parents living outside the home gradually disengaged from child-rearing responsibilities. It is especially common for non-custodial parents to retreat altogether, especially when a stepparent enters the scene. For many, they become uncomfortable with their marginal role. The step-parent often poses a direct threat to the biological parent. The most striking finding amongst remarriage studies is that nearly one half of all children from divorced families had not seen their biological parent, usually the father, in the previous 5 years (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985,894).

Although this is extremely rare, when mothers are the non-residential parents, the contact between them and their children is maintained, and they play a more active role in child-rearing than non-residential fathers who usually drop out of the picture. Indeed, data from the National Survey of Children indicate that for most non-residential male parents who only see their children occasionally, their time was almost exclusively dedicated to recreational activities, rarely helping out with the more mundane tasks of child rearing such as supervising homework, or directing the child in household activities.

It would seem that social parenthood takes precedence over biological parenthood. Furstenberg and Spanier (1984) describe results of the National Survey of Children from divorced to remarriage families



and indicate the pattern of childcare after divorce and remarriage was characterized as "a system of child swapping" (1984,29), whereby fathers exchange one set of children for another. Seen from a child's perspective, low visitation coupled with the knowledge that one's biological father has a new wife and children with whom he lives and spends his time only adds to his/her grief, anger, sense of abandonment, and lack of self-esteem (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Berman, 1990).

In their 1985 study of remarriages and patterns of child rearing after divorce, Furstenberg and Nord found the following in comparing children's perceptions of residential and non-residential parents. Children who see their (nonresidential) fathers more often do not generally enjoy closer relations than those with occasional contact. Those children with fathers living outside the home are decidedly more discontent with their paternal relationship than those residing with their father. More than half of them say that they do not get the affection they need from the non-residential parent. Many more complaints are directed at the non-residential father than the non-residential mother. The majority experience close relations with the stepfather, and are more likely to complain about the stepmother. And most children experience a great deal of arguments, conflicts, and guilt in dealing with where they fit in and with their affections for their biological and step parents.

In the same way as it was for the divorce research, the great variation in the quality and nature of the experience becomes clear. Remarriages vary by previous marital experience as well as by the

presence or absence of children from one or both marital partners as well as new partners.

On the positive side, remarriage can probably result in an improved standard of living for children. The research on remarriage suggests that adults are satisfied with their second marriages. A happier marital situation for the custodial parent is bound to have positive spin-offs for the children. Divorce and a remarriage can provide relief after a stressful marriage, as well as opportunities for positive growth (Furstenberg and Spanier, 1984,164).

In addition, remarriage can provide a "father" figure that was perhaps lacking in the child's previous environment. Preliminary data from the National Survey on Children indicate that many children develop reasonably close attachments to their step-parents and that most step-families function rather well. It must therefore be recognized that "good parenting relationships can exist between children and adults who are not related by blood" (Eichler, 1988,271).

On the negative side, residential parents disproportionately assume the responsibility of child care. From a child's perspective, his or her father's occasional phone call or rare visit is for many a painful experience which manifests itself in a series of different ways such as low self-esteem, inability to trust others, and difficulties in relating to members of the opposite sex (Baker, 1990; Berman, 1990).

Yet, it is important to state that researchers have shown that the ability of children to manage the process of divorce and remarriage seems to be reasonably high when one considers the relations existing between their biological parents. "It is clear that at the present time,

coparenting among formerly married couples is more of a myth than a reality in all but a tiny fraction of families" (Furstenberg and Spanier, 1984,902).

Awareness of the economic and social costs of divorce may be reducing the relatively benign view that some social scientists had about the long-term consequences of divorce (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986; Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989). Many social scientists now argue that marital disruption is neither a trivial nor inconsequential event. The evidence is strong. And even if the long-term consequences of divorce are not traumatic, family dissolution is regarded by children of divorce, both at the time of the divorce and later in their adult lives, as a powerful influence on the course of their lives (Furstenberg, 1990; Berman, 1990). Although divorce can typically reduce the family's economic resources, stress the parent-child relationship, alter and/or sometimes destroy the parent system as well as reshape kinship ties, most individuals are able to cope with the strains of divorce and remarriage (with or without some form of therapy). Given sufficient time, most people, whether children or adult, are able to adapt to these life changes (Furstenberg et al., 1987).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Why Interview?

The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to "evaluate", as the term is normally used. Rather, at its roots lies an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 1991,3). There has been a long tradition of interviewing in social studies. The seminal work of Merton and his students was based partly on data collected in interviews (e.g., Merton et al., 1956; Zuckerman, 1972). A decade later, this tradition had evolved to cover the examination and explanation of human actions in all their richness. Indeed, as long ago as 1942, it was argued that the best way of finding out something about people's activities was to ask them (Brenner, Brown and Canter, 1985,2).

For the most part, interviews are used as a technique for obtaining information that will enable the analyst to describe, explain and/or predict social actions that occur outside the interview. Interviewers usually attempt to extract from their subjects' verbal responses an accurate formalized version of their actions, motives, interests, etc. which can be used to describe and explain what is going on in some naturally occurring area of social life. Interview data should therefore be used to reveal the interpretative practices through which subjects come to construct versions of their social world. It is this willingness to treat individuals as the heroes of their own drama,

as valuable sources of particular information which is at the base of the resurgence of interest in various in-depth interviewing procedures.

I have chosen to interview because I am interested in other people's stories, experiences and interpretations. Stories are a way of knowing and are essentially a meaning-making process. It is the process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience (Schutz, 1967,12). At the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language. "The use of language, itself,...contains within it the paradigm of cooperative inquiry...it is difficult to see how there could be a more fundamental mode of inquiry for human beings into the human condition" (Heron, 1981,26). Throughout history, recounting narratives of experience has been the principal way humans have made sense of their experience.

Interviewing requires interviewers to keep their egos in check, and realize that they are not the centre of the world. It requires interviewers to indicate to their subjects that their stories are important. Although Schutz mentions that it is never possible to understand another perfectly, because to do so would mean we would have entered the other's stream of consciousness. Recognizing the limits on our understanding of others, we can still strive to comprehend them by understanding their actions or the meaning they attach to their action (1967,chap.3). The way to meaning is to be able to put behaviour in context.

Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behaviour, and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behaviour. A basic assumption of in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience. Interviewing allows us to put behaviour in context and provides access to understanding subjects' actions (Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 1991). When the researcher is interested in what the individuals' experience is and what meaning they make out of that experience, if the interest is in what Schutz calls their "subjective understanding", as is the case in my research, then it is apparent that interviewing may be, in most cases, the best avenue of inquiry. Indeed, my goal is to understand the meaning daughters involved in divorce make of their experience in order to understand what variables helped or hindered their process of transition.

In addition, when one considers the huge amount of research which has been conducted on children of divorce, it is obvious from the wide range of inconclusive and contradictory findings (seen in chapter 2) that statistical information on children of divorce provides us with relatively little information. Since survey research has so often produced inconclusive findings, the latest studies have utilized in-depth interviewing as their method of research. It has been discovered to be much more fruitful and revealing, and it has also unveiled recurring patterns, themes, and similarities between children of divorce, indicating that the effects of divorce on children may have been seriously underestimated (Berman, 1990, 265; Furstenberg, 1990, 208). Interviewing enables the scholar to elicit information from its

"natural" source, the participant. It allows the individuals whose circumstances and/or behaviour is under study to speak for themselves rather than have the scholar do so. Interviewing permits us to see reality as it is seen from the participant's eyes, enabling us to catch, directly the participant's interpretative process: definitions of situations, subjective meanings, emotions and thoughts. Therein lies the richness of this research method.

### Meanings

Symbolic interactionism has three simple premises. The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. These things (objects) can, for the purpose of convenience, be classified in three categories: a) physical objects, such as chairs, trees, dolls; b) social objects, such as students, mothers, friends and; c) abstract objects, such as moral principles, philosophies, or ideas like justice, compassion and so on. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things (objects) he encounters (Blumer, 1969,2). Both psychological and social science today have a tendency to treat human behaviour as the product of various factors that play upon human beings. Concern is with the behaviour and the factors regarded as producing them. As a result, the meanings of things for human beings are often bypassed in the factors used to account for their behaviour. The symbolic interactionist position is that the meanings that things have

for human beings are central in their own right. Ignoring the said meanings toward which people act is seen as falsifying the behaviour under study (Blumer, 1969,3). Participant observation and interviewing are research methods which enable us to discover these meanings. However, due to the fact that the events under study took place 20 years ago, as well as the limited amount of time and resources available, interviewing was the obvious choice.

Symbolic interactionism views meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people, whereby their actions operate to define things for each other. This perspective identifies two forms or levels of social interaction. The first one is "the conversation of gestures", often termed non-verbal interaction, since one individual responds directly to an action without interpretation such as bodily movements, expressions, tones of voices. The second one is the use of "significant symbols", also termed symbolic interaction, involving interpretation of action, whereby individuals seek to understand the meaning of each other's action, take each other's roles, and so on (Blumer, 1969,8). Although interviewing provides us with the capability of observing and recording both verbal and non-verbal interaction, it does not enable us to do the same of the action the interviewee is describing. This is one of the limitations of interviewing in relation to symbolic interactionism.

Even if the "the world of reality exists only in human experience and it appears only in the form in which human beings see that world" (Blumer, 1969,22), "We can look upon human group life as chiefly a vast interpretative process in which people singly and collectively guide



themselves by defining the objects, events, and situations they encounter" (Blumer, 1969,132). In order to analyze human group life in its general character, a scheme must be designed to fit this process of interpretation (Blumer, 1969,133). Symbolic interactionism is such a scheme, and interviewing enables us to catch that important process of interpretation.

#### Advantages and Disadvantages

There are many advantages to interviewing. It is a powerful way to gain insight into personal matters (such as divorce), definitions of situations and subjective meanings through understanding the experience of the individuals under study. The central value of the interview as a research procedure is that it allows both parties to explore the meaning of the questions and answers involved. There is an implicit, or explicit sharing and/or negotiation of understanding in the interview situation which is not so central, and often not present, in other research procedures (Brenner, Brown, and Canter, 1985,3). Another advantage of using interviewing as a research method is that any misunderstandings on the part of the interviewer or the interviewee can be checked immediately in a way which is just not possible when questionnaires are being completed, or tests performed.

As a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language. Interviewing also involves a direct examination of the phenomenon under study rather than the use of a model or simulation. With interviewing, there is the advantage of rapid, immediate responses. It is no accident that public opinion surveys are built around interviews. Interviews afford an

on-the-spot directness to the information and a general speed of response not obtainable any other way (Brenner, Brown, and Canter, 1985,3). Through interviewing, one does not only collect rich data (through language), but also through another form of language, the "non-verbal" one, which consists of expressions, body gestures, tone of voice, etc.. This cannot be observed through questionnaires, telephone-call surveys and so forth. "Interviewing permits unobtrusive observations which can be of interest to the researcher. It also affirms the importance of the individual and his or her story without denigrating the possibility of collaboration" (Seidman, 1991,6).

Moreover, interviews permit the collection of the most extensive data on each person questioned, and all kinds of data may be collected within the same interview, e.g. health information, residential histories, political attitudes etc. (Brenner, Brown, and Canter, 1985,4). Interviews permit for much more flexibility than is possible with self-administered questionnaires. For example, when research objectives necessitate the use of open-ended questions (like this research does) which require respondents to answer in their own words, in contrast to closed-ended questions for which specific response options are provided, an interviewer will usually be able to elicit a fuller, more complete response than with a questionnaire requiring respondents to write out answers. This is particularly true with respondents whose writing skills are weak or who are less motivated to make the effort to respond fully (Singleton, Straits, Straits, and McAllister, 1988,243).

Finally, interviews also have a high response rate, which means less bias is introduced into the data as a result of non-participation of sampled persons. "Reasons of high response rates include the intrinsic attractiveness of being interviewed: having someone's attention, being asked to talk about oneself; the difficulty of saying "no" to someone asking for something in person" (Singleton, Straits, Straits, and McAllister, 1988,244).

However, there are some disadvantages to interviewing. Interviewing research takes a great deal of time and, sometimes, money. The researcher has to conceptualize the project: he or she must decide on structured versus unstructured interviews, design a questionnaire suitable for use in interviewer-respondent interaction, have effective interviewing skills, conduct a pretest in order to ensure participants will respond well and not withdraw from answering any questions, and determine the totality and the order of issues in the data collection programme, as they apply to the interviewees. The researcher has to establish access. The difficulty of locating respondents not at home when the interviewer first calls is another disadvantage of interviewing.

In addition, getting access to people when one deals with sensitive issues can be difficult, for young researchers without a history of past studies or publications are often turned down by organizations which could provide respondents and valuable information. Problems can also arise when respondents refuse to be taped. Getting everything down can then be particularly challenging. Some respondents may not be very cooperative, others may decide to evade certain

questions or will simply lie shamelessly. These are all possibilities. And the analysis of the data, along with its transcription (especially if you were allowed to tape the interviews) can be painstakingly long and difficult. Although any method of inquiry worth its salt takes time, thoughtfulness, energy and money, interviewing is especially labour-intensive (Seidman, 1991,6).

In a nutshell, the sociological literature on interviewing consists of the following : on the one hand, a number of studies which reinforce the strengths and values of using such research and on the proper techniques and methods used to successfully conduct interviews. On the other hand, a limited number of studies that have revealed some of the basic problems that underlie interviewing techniques.

The interviews conducted in this research were standardized: they had a common set of questions for all respondents. The wording and order of the questionnaire was the same for all interviewees. And the interviewer schedule was composed of a series of open-ended questions. Moreover, the set of questions found in this study (see Appendix) were chosen because they enabled me to operationalize the variables I wished to study, such as daughters' level of maladjustment after divorce, mothers' emotional health, level of conflict, and so forth. In addition, similar sets of questions were also used before by other individuals researching adult children of divorce, and they yielded rich data.

### Sample

The data gathered for this research were collected from one-hour interviews with 20 women, 10 of whom were randomly selected from a hospital list (including women of divorced families who sought help from

the following: social worker, psychotherapist, psychologist, social therapist). The other 10 females were selected from a snowball sample (word of mouth). The sample was divided in this manner in order to include females who sought some kind of professional help, and those who did not. As Anne-Marie Ambert (1980) clearly points out, many studies on children of divorce consist of samples of women who represent the more distressed population of children of divorce. Such is the case with Wallerstein and Kelly's (1980) research. Their sample consisted solely of children of divorce who had been recommended for therapy and/or counselling. Indeed, the results of their particular study were rather gloomy, painting a distressing picture of children of divorce. This is precisely why I chose to have a sample which was divided in the said fashion.

The sample is fairly homogeneous. All the women were between 20 and 26 years old. All were Catholic or Protestant, possessed a university degree, either certificate or diploma, or were enrolled in a university. All had parents who divorced when they were between 2 to 5 years of age; all came from middle-class backgrounds and all of their mothers' had sole custody and their fathers' visitation rights. Their occupations included: an information agent, a car rental manager, a telephone technician, a hairdresser, three students, a travel agency owner, a clothes shop owner and a private secretary. Because this is a small and fairly homogeneous sample, the results cannot be generalized to the total population of daughters of divorce. Nonetheless, these results can shed some light on what factors actually amplify or dampen the impact of divorce, and thereby aid in understanding and perhaps

helping children of divorce in their moment of transition, through their process of adjustment and, most of all, through their time of need.

#### Difficulties Encountered

Having to redo a questionnaire, and thereby a pre-test, because it had not yielded data which could help measure the factors I wanted to examine, proved to be disappointing and time-consuming.

Transcribing the tapes of twenty one-hour interviews was both tedious and equally time-consuming. Translating the data from French to English was an equally long and strenuous task. But the most difficult part of this research was dealing with the grief and discomfort daughters of divorce conveyed, either directly through verbal language or indirectly through body language. Although my wounds (with regard to my parents' divorce) have healed, it was still difficult at times to refrain from becoming somewhat emotional.

I was also confronted with the problem of noticing subjects saying one thing, but their body language another. However, this happened with only three subjects, and all with the same question: Were you affected by your father's absence? In all three cases, the respondents said "no" or "I don't care". But their angry expression, high tone of voice and responses to other questions clearly indicated they were affected (hurt or angry) and that it was their way of dealing with it.

Some respondents were very emotional. Two cried. Others explicitly said "this is still hard to talk about". A few expressed anger and disappointment. Dealing with others' grief was particularly difficult for me, because I understood what some were referring to, since I had been there myself. Nevertheless, even if the majority of daughters found

some topics difficult to talk about, they reported it was helpful to do so, especially with someone who had been there herself.

Finally, staying neutral, being value-free, keeping my ego in check, not assuming I knew how respondents were going to answer, and trying to keep myself out of the picture as though I had not been there myself was difficult at times.

## CHAPTER 4

### Before The Divorce

"The divorce of one's parents is an event that plays an integral part in shaping the psyche. It is woven into one's values, emotional processes, sexuality, self-esteem, sense of trust, everything. We live with it always" (Berman, 1990,29).

The majority of adult daughters of divorce interviewed for this research described their parents' divorce as having had a profound effect on their lives, and on the person whom they have become.

The degree to which parental divorce affects the lives of these daughters depends upon a number of factors, such as the quality of relationship between the parents, the mother's emotional health, the quality of the relationship between the parents and children, the type of divorce experienced (high or low conflict divorces), and equally on the daughters' adjustment to the said situations. Because I am focusing on the interpretations and definitions of situations of daughters of divorce, a specific set of questions were used in order to measure the concepts which are of interest to this study's objective.

This chapter will look at the following concepts: the level of conflict, the emotional health of the mother, the level of maladjustment of daughters after divorce, and the parent/child relationship. These concepts will be measured by the types of responses given to specific questions. The level of conflict is measured by asking daughters to define the situation which existed in their home prior to divorce. The mother's emotional health is measured by asking this question: How would you describe your mother (and/or her emotional state) prior to divorce? Maladjustment is defined as the degree of difficulty daughters report experiencing, and in adjusting to their parents' divorce and the changes



it entails. Maladjustment is measured in terms of this question: how difficult was your parent's divorce and/or how were you affected? And finally, the parent/child relationship is measured with the following question: How would you describe your relationship and the level of intimacy with your mother and father?

#### Situation In The Home

The literature on children of divorce indicates that parental conflict, both pre-and post separation, has a pronounced effect on the coping efforts of children. Studies tend to support the position that in general, pre-divorce parental discord may be a more potent influence on children's subsequent adjustment than separation or divorce itself (Eichler, 1988,245-46; Berman, 1990,95). Therefore, in order to measure their level of conflict, I asked daughters of divorce to describe and define their home situation prior to their parents' divorce.

Although the daughters were relatively young prior to their parents' divorce, the majority of them could easily recall the occurrences of arguments, fights and/or violence prior to their parents' marital dissolution: "So many times my father came home drunk and physically and verbally abused my mother (Lina)." "My father was always gone. My mother was always crying; she would continually break things (Virginia)." "My mother threw an ashtray and got my father on the side of the head. He bled. That was too much for him; he left (Jeanne)." While more than half of these daughters stated these recollections were (today) not painful, this was probably not the case when they were experiencing them: "I was terrified at the sight of my mother's bruises, and I was scared for her (Veronica)."

Dina adds: "My brother and I would leave as soon as our father would come home to avoid the screaming." For Dina, her father's presence signified ongoing fighting, unpleasantness, and grief. Therefore, she and her brother decided to leave the house as soon as their father arrived. In turn, Dina reported that she could never have any kind of relationship with her father. And in fact, she reports these feelings continue today.

Some daughters' non-verbal language, such as their tone of voice and body movements, indicated that these memories were still very painful, even two decades later: "One night you see the man you're supposed to love and respect slap your mother across the face. That's something you never forget (Veronica)." "My mother was very sick, suffering from severe migraines; but my robot of a father kept on acting as if nothing was wrong (Laura)." While some tried to hide their pain, others (two subjects) were explicit about it as they apologetically dried their tears: "I would cry myself to sleep and pray my father wouldn't come home. I wished he would stumble, fall and die (Lina)."

Paulina adds: "My father always had better things to do. He was usually too busy for us. It was very hurtful." To Paulina, her father's lack of interest signified pain and rejection. This rejection has had consequences on not only the relationship she reported not having with her father today, but more particularly on her self-esteem. Paulina explicitly revealed that feelings of inferiority, combined with high levels of insecurity, affected her in many ways, such as not accepting jobs for fear of not being good enough, not getting involved for fear of getting dumped.

On the other hand, there are Nastasia and Anna who remember their situation in the home as wonderful: "My memories of those days are probably the most beautiful ones I possess (Nastasia)." "I wasn't aware of any parental conflict or difficulties; those were happy times (Anna)." "I had the best family, my parents were warm and loving (Stacey)." The range of responses are reflective of the level of conflict these daughters report coming from. For instance, Lina, Virginia, Jeanne, Veronica, Dina, Laura and Paulina come from high conflict homes, while Nastasia, Anna and Stacey come from low conflict ones. While Jeanne defines her home situation as a "never-ending debate tournament", Nastasia defines her home situation as "beautiful times".

As for Virginia, her definition makes it clear that her home situation was one of high conflict. Yet, she reports that these times were (simply) "not nice". But her non-verbal language, such as the constant movement of her leg, the increase in her tone of voice, and her sudden avoidance of eye contact revealed they were much more than "not nice times". They seemed more to be painful, difficult and unhappy times. Jeanne and Virginia's definitions of their situations in the home prior to their parents' divorce reflect the majority (15) of definitions of situations the daughters of divorce gave and where they found themselves: in high conflict homes. Four of these fifteen daughters came from homes with both high conflict and high abuse. For instance, Veronica interprets her situation as "very rough and at times abusive", and Lina's recollects of "a frightful, nightmarish time. As the literature review suggest, "the greater the amount of interparent

hostility prior to marital separation, the greater the maladjustment of the child" (Furstenberg, 1990,396).

The responses given on the degree of difficulty daughters reported having in adjusting to their parent's divorce revealed obvious differences, and thus explain the designations for maladjustment in Table #1 and #2. Some daughters explicitly said they had experienced no difficulty in adjusting to their parent's divorce. Rather, they reported experiencing a sense of relief. These responses were therefore grouped in a "no maladjustment" category.

Others explicitly said they experienced great difficulty adjusting. A few mentioned still experiencing feelings of hurt and rejection today. Some expressed a need for professional help, since they had such difficulty coping. Others reported having just too much to deal with besides their grief. There was their mother's grief, the ongoing conflicts between their parents and remarriages to deal with. These responses were grouped in the "high maladjustment" category.

A very small number of daughters fell somewhere in the middle. They reported a little difficulty adjusting to their parent's divorce, such as changing neighbourhoods, missing their father, and dealing with an unhappy mother. But again, they explicitly said it took a very short time before things were almost as good as new. Hence, these daughters' responses were grouped in the "low maladjustment" category.

The conflict categories were designated according to the responses daughters reported on the level of conflict which existed in the home prior to divorce. Those daughters who reported hearing virtually no yelling, no fighting, no crying taking place between their parents were

all grouped in the "low conflict" category. On the other hand, the responses revealing memories of physical and emotional abuse, parents constantly arguing, fighting, and mothers regularly crying, yelling and breaking things were grouped in the "high conflict" category.

TABLE #1  
LEVEL OF MALADJUSTMENT AFTER DIVORCE  
BY LEVEL OF CONFLICT

Level of Maladjustment	Level of Conflict		
	High	Low	
No maladjustment	4	1	5
Low Maladjustment	—	3	3
High Maladjustment	11	1	12
Total	15	5	20

Table #1 describes maladjustment in terms of conflict. It shows us that the majority of daughters who experienced high maladjustment after divorce come from high conflict homes, 11 out of 12. It also indicates that of the 5 daughters who came from the low conflict homes, only one reports having high maladjustment after divorce: that is Aifa, who left her native country and her father to move to Canada with a new stepfather, and who reported great difficulty in adjusting to those changes. The other four daughters who came from high conflict homes and report no maladjustment after divorce are all daughters who had

physically or verbally abusive fathers. They were relieved, not conflicted, by the divorce.

As for the one daughter, Stacey, who comes from a low conflict home and reports no maladjustment, she informs us that her parents worked together in a cooperative fashion after the divorce. Indeed, Stacey's cooperative parents are not typical of parents of children of divorce. Stacey's social interactions with both parents were associated with positive feelings. Her parents were not resentful nor were they quarrelling. Stacey reveals that her parents' friendly interactions affected how well she adapted to her parents divorcing and how close she is presently to both of them.

The variations in responses was to be expected, considering the endless possibilities and vast array of experiences individuals have, and the numerous ways which individuals can go about terminating a marriage. However, it is obvious from many of these recollections, some more than others, that these daughters' pre-school years ( prior to divorce) were not happy ones, and these responses indicate that they are not easily forgotten (Berman 1990,29). "Being rejected by your own father is something that never really leaves you (Jenna).

Likewise, Mikasa's painful memories of her father abusing her mother had serious repercussions in the way she perceived men and women in relationships. She reported that for the longest time, she was unable to date for fear of being abused herself. Thus, she remained single for the first 21 years of her life. "Seeing the pain my father inflicted upon my mother really disgusted me from the male species (Mikasa)."

Even if some daughters revealed they were not sure exactly what was going on then, the majority were aware of the existence of some form of problems and they nevertheless recalled having a sense and/or could feel something just wasn't right. For example, although Olivia came from a low conflict home, she reported noticing changes in her parents' non-verbal language:

"My father used to laugh and hug my mother all the time. He'd also be home early after work and he'd play with me. Suddenly, he would come home late from work. He would hardly speak or touch my mother, and he never had time to play with me anymore. I remember being very scared... it was like I felt something really terrible was going to happen and I was right."

It is reflected in the literature on children of divorce that children usually are quick to sense that something has gone astray between their parents (Despert, 1982; Wolchik and Karoly, 1988). Evidence suggests that children very quickly detect that "mommy and daddy are just not the same as they used to be" and/or simply feel "that something terrible is going to happen" (Despert, 1982, 179-183).

Both maladjustment and conflict are slippery concepts; that is, both are defined by the respondents according to their own specific criteria, values, and expectations. Thus, in principle, one person's high conflict may be relatively low or medium to another. What is normal to one, is abnormal to another. The tables therefore reflect subjective perceptions of reality, which may contain a wide range of behaviours; but it is precisely these subjective perceptions which are under investigation.

Recollections of Mom and Dad:  
Spousal Relations and Emotional State

This section reveals that daughters' awareness, their perception of the relations between their parents, their perceptions of their mothers' feelings toward their fathers and the description of their parents' emotional state were all affected by the level of conflict in the home, prior to divorce.

Although many daughters reported that their father was often unavailable, they were nevertheless able to describe their parents' relations and emotional state by interpreting the events which took place in the home. "My father was not around enough for me to recall how he really was. But I know my mother hurt, because she would sob when she thought I couldn't hear her (Michelle)." "My parents seemed so in love, they never raised their voices (Stacey)." "My mother had to love my father to take all that abuse (Victoria)." Victoria revealed that the abusive interactions which took place between her parents were very frightening. But because her mother stood it, she thought that it was what you had to do when you were married and/or in love. As a result, she was terrified of falling in love and required professional help at a later age to overcome that fear.

The responses on the relations between parents indicated the following: the majority of daughters' fathers were very seldom home (prior to the divorce): "My father was hardly ever home. And when he was, he was usually sick. My mother was entirely devoted to him (Celine)." "My father always had better things to do. He was usually too busy for us (Paulina)." "My father was only home long enough to have his meal. That was all that seemed to interest him (Frances)."



Moreover, the relations between the spouses were reflective of the level of conflict existing in the home. For instance, Dina came from a high conflict home, and she described her parents' relations as "constant arguing". Similarly, Roxanne described her parents' relation as "a rollercoaster ride". On the other hand, Aifa and Stacey come from low conflict homes, and they interpreted their parents' relations in the following manner: "My parents seemed perfect for each other...they were so affectionate" (Stacey). "My mother and father had close relations and shared wonderful times" (Aifa).

The majority of daughters reported their mother as loving their father very much, for a variety of different reasons. Victoria (through role-taking) advanced that: "My mother had to love my father, because she stayed with him, even though he was abusing us." Dina said her mother loved her father dearly because: "She forgave all his extramarital affairs."

Others, such as Michelle and Frances through interpreting their mothers' non-verbal language, such as seeing her cry, break things or lock herself in her room for hours at a time, have explained them in a similar fashion: "My mother loved my father, for if she had not, she wouldn't have shed so many tears nor been so moody (Michelle)." "When my father wasn't around, she wouldn't have been so depressed and she wouldn't have locked herself up like she did so often (Frances)."

The majority of daughters described their mothers' emotional state with relative ease: depressed, sad, unhappy, and hurting. Virginia states: "My mother would get hysterical over insignificant things, she would slap me and yell for anything and everything". Roxanne adds: "My

mother would break things, for example, throw a record player across the room or break figurines."

Other daughters whom, such as Mikasa and Lina had alcoholic and/or abusive fathers described their mothers' emotional state as follows: "My mother was nervous and trembled a lot. She always seemed on edge" (Mikasa). "Afraid, my mother was just terrified, and so was I" (Lina).

And understandably, daughters who had low conflict in the home, i.e. Nastasia and Anna, described their parents' emotional state in a more positive light: "All I remember is that my mother was very calm and peaceful; that changed somewhat after the divorce" (Nastasia). "My mother was very happy, I never saw her cry, nor yell or complain" (Anna). However, daughters reported that describing their fathers' emotional state was difficult, if not impossible to recall, since for the most part, fathers were not home often enough.

These responses (on mother's emotional state) clearly indicate that not only were the majority of these daughters' mothers unhappy, which is to be expected prior to divorcing, but also that their daughters were to some degree aware of their unhappiness. This is likely to have affected them and naturally their interpretation of those times and these responses. "It was very hard to see my mother unhappy; she would become mean and angry, and then she would cry and apologize (Virginia)." "It was agonizing to hear my mother being abused and not being able to help her (Mikasa)." "The divorce wouldn't have been so painful if I hadn't seen my mother hurt so much" (Jenna). Several reviewers have concluded that the emotional climate of the home as well

as the emotional health of the mother are both extremely important factors affecting to postdivorce adjustment of children (Hetmerington and Arastesh, 1988,156, Eichler, 1988,245-46).

Table #2 describes the level of maladjustment after divorce in terms of mothers' emotional health. The responses given by daughters on the description of their mothers' emotional state and/or behaviour prior to divorce, were grouped in the following manner. Again, the responses fell into two very distinct categories. Either daughters described their mothers' emotional state as being very distressed or as being slightly distressed. For example, the "low level of distress" responses described mothers as being happy, calm and peaceful, reporting not noticing any changes in their mothers' emotional state. While responses grouped in the "high level of distress" category described their mothers as scared, nervous, tense, aggressive, physically and verbally abusive, depressed, and as having violent mood swings.

Table #2 indicates that all those eleven who reported their mother as being highly distressed reported high maladjustment levels. Furthermore, low levels of emotional distress (nine mothers) were associated with low or no maladjustment problems with the daughters (eight).

Aifa was the exception, for although she described her mother as having a low distress level, she still had a high level of maladjustment because she experienced great difficulty adjusting to a new country and a new father. Research indicates that the emotional health of the mother may be one of the most significant factors affecting the post-divorce adjustment of children (Eichler, 1988; Berman, 1990).

TABLE #2

LEVEL OF MALADJUSTMENT AFTER DIVORCE  
BY MOTHERS' EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Level of Maladjustment	Level of Distress		
	Low	High	
No maladjustment	5	-	5
Low Maladjustment	3	-	3
High Maladjustment	1	11	12
Total	9	11	20

Relations With Parents and Children:

Evidence indicates that the level of conflict prior to divorce will not only affect the child's post-divorce adjustment, but also stress and affect the parent-child relations (Peterson and Zill, 1986,298). Table #3 describes the type of relationship daughters report having with their parents in terms of the level of conflict.

The responses on daughters' descriptions of the relationship and level of intimacy existing between their parents yielded two different categories. Most daughters' (13) responses indicated they were close to their mothers only, seven were close to both of their parents. The majority reported their mother was more caring, approachable, and always available in comparison to their fathers, who usually couldn't be bothered or was simply not available. And some mentioned they felt their mother would understand them better, being a woman herself. Those who were close to both parents indicated that daughters felt comfortable

talking with both parents, for they both displayed interest and care, as well as availability. Thereby, daughters reported feeling free to go to either one parent for advice or anything else.

TABLE #3  
PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIP  
BY CONFLICT

Relationship With Parents	Level of Conflict		
	High	Low	
Close to One Only	13	—	13
Close to Both	2	5	7
Total	15	5	20

Table #3 indicates that the majority of daughters who came from low-conflict homes report close relationships to both of their parents, while the majority of those coming from high-conflict homes report a close relationship with only one parent. This is a most important finding. Virginia and Roxanne, who report being close to both parents, were two exceptions. Virginia explains: "I felt my father loved me just as much as my mother then." Roxanne adds: "My father and I were so close. He always had time for me, and he told me repeatedly that I was the prettiest girl he'd ever known."

An overwhelming eighteen daughters expressed having a closer relationship with their mothers: "We were everything to each other (Lina)." "My mother was the best (Jenna)." "My mother is the most loving

person I've ever known (Michelle)." "If it wasn't for my mother, I don't know how I would have survived (Victoria)." One daughter, Jeanne, stated she was not close to her mother; she was much closer to her father: "My mother was a strict and severe person; my dad was a lot more fun." And similarly, although Aifa was close to both of her parents, she revealed being closer to her father: "He and I spoke the same language. My father always had time to do things with me. My mother had time only for my younger brothers." Aifa interpreted her mother's lack of time (for her) as rejection. She reported this favouritism and lack of attention, in comparison to what she felt her brothers were getting, forever affected the relationship she had with her mother. Aifa in one of only two daughters who reported being closer to her father.

And only seven daughters reported having close relationships with both parents: Nastasia, Anna, Aifa, Stacey, Olivia, Roxanne and Virginia. "I was very close to both of my parents. I enjoyed close and affectionate relationships with both of them (Anna)."

"I was close to both of them in different ways. My Mom and I were close in an emotional and affectionate way. My dad and I, we didn't have to say or do anything, we could just be sitting besides one another, listening to music, enjoying the moment and be so close (Virginia)."

One important finding regarding the relations daughters report having with their parents is that according to their interpretations, the majority of fathers are unavailable, thereby not present in the father role, nor in the family. This is likely to have had consequences on the meanings daughters attributed to father unavailability and on the relationships they reported having with them. "If my father had been around, I would have known that he cared, and we could have had a

relationship (Frances)." "My father only cared for his work, so why should I have cared? (Marie)."

Research to date indicates that father unavailability has negative effects on the child-father relationship and on his or her pre- and post-divorce adjustment (Peterson and Zill, 1986). This is significant because we already know from previous research (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985,894) that a father's presence diminishes significantly after divorce. But more importantly, daughters interpret this absence in highly negative terms: "I felt unimportant in my father's eyes (Jenna)". "Sensing your father has better things to do than to be with you is very painful (Paulina)". "I thought I was unlovable and unworthy, that no man could love me, since my father did not (Virginia)". "I felt rejected, abandoned and inferior to everyone else (Michelle)".

Moreover, it is likely that daughters' interpretations of their mothers' emotional health, as well as witnessing their mothers' changing behaviours, have in some way affected their relationship with them. "I took care of her when she was hurt, and I saved her many times from my father by calling the cops. We were and still are everything to each other (Lina)." "I was always close to my mother. She needed me so much. It seemed I was the only one who could make her laugh (Jenna)." "My mother and I, we were each other's lifeline (Virginia)." Herbert Blumer suggests that if a "significant other", in this case the mother, defines a situation as painful for instance, the child will come to see the situation in a similar fashion to that of the mother.

Indeed, Nastasia, Anna, Aifa and Stacey (who come from low conflict homes) reported their mothers never argued, never yelled and

were never depressed, and so they interpreted their mothers' emotional state as a happy one. On the other hand, Jenna, (who comes from a high conflict home) recalls her mother often grieving, and has interpreted her mother's emotional state as very unhappy. What the "significant other", in this case the mother, projects will have an effect on the daughter's interpretation of the situation and on the type of relationship daughters enjoyed with their mother. Research to date indicates that there is a strong similarity with children's feeling towards their mothers. Usually, 70% of divorced children report having close relationships with their mothers', while 36% of divorced children report being close to their fathers (Peterson and Zill, 1986,298). Indeed, not many (seven) daughters in this sample enjoyed a close relationship with their father, while the majority did with their mother.

#### Summary

The majority (15) of daughters reported coming from high conflict homes. Only five daughters reported coming from low conflict home. And four of these fifteen daughters also witnessed and/or suffered abuse. Levels of conflict affect the interpretations and definitions, daughters give of their parents' relations, emotional states, as well as their own relations with their parents. The majority of daughters' reports of their mothers' emotional states are described as having been very difficult and painful to deal with.

Moreover, the relationships daughters report having with their fathers clearly indicates that the majority of fathers were absent in their father role. Father unavailability and the level of conflict both



affect the type of relationship daughters report having with them. Indeed, very few daughters reported having a close relationship with their father.

There are likely to be a wide number of reasons why 18 daughters reported being closer to their mothers than to their fathers, one being that mothers were the ones who took care of them, displayed love and affection, but most specifically, were there (available) in their time of need. Regrettably, the same cannot be said for the majority of these daughters' fathers. The latest (1992) American report on families (entitled "Families in Crisis") conducted by the Department of Health and Welfare indicates that the role of the American male in the family is one of an "absent" father. And unless some fundamental changes, such as adequate government support programs, new parent education programs, and donations from business communities start taking place, the role of the American male in the family is likely to remain one of an absent father. Indeed, this research reaffirms the "absent" role of the father in the majority of families, with regrettably very few exceptions.

## CHAPTER 5

### AFTER THE DIVORCE

The time immediately after the divorce is particularly difficult for daughters. Although many difficulties (like dealing with parental conflict, an emotionally distressed mother and an absent father) occurred prior to their parents' divorce, the majority of daughters recall these difficulties as becoming somewhat more pronounced, and thereby more difficult to deal with, in the period following their parents' marital dissolution. Many daughters reported that trying to deal with these difficulties and changes encountered after the divorce was like fighting a losing battle.

In this chapter, the following topics will be discussed: responsibility and/or guilt, changes and/or difficulties encountered, the availability of the father and the relations between parents and children.

#### Did you feel responsible?

The literature often reports that children feel responsible in some way for their parents' divorce, as well as guilty (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Berman, 1990). So I asked my sample about this. None of them felt either responsible or guilty at any time. And most said they knew why the marriage had collapsed. The reasons they reported reflected popular causes of divorce such as married too young, lack of communication, adultery, alcoholism, physical abuse and so forth (Ambert, 1980; Peters, 1988).

Four daughters blamed their fathers' use of alcohol and/or physical abuse: Mikasa, Victoria, Veronica and Lina. "Alcohol was the

problem (Veronica)." "His abuse was just too much (Lina)." Five daughters reported their parents had married too young: Nastasia, Anna, Stacey and Aifa. "They simply married at a much too early age (Nastasia)." Seven stated their parents were continuously fighting: Jeanne, Virginia, Frances, Laura, Roxanne, Michelle, Celine. "My parents would argue constantly (Celine)."

One daughter, Dina, blamed her father's extra-marital affairs: "My father was entirely responsible, him and his unfaithfulness." Another daughter, Olivia, blamed her father's coming out of the closet (declaring himself a homosexual): "My mother found out that my father was having affairs with men." Three daughters described their fathers as married to their work and as having time only for their jobs: Paulina, Marie and Jenna. "My father was married to his job (Paulina)." And only two daughters, Jeanne and Aifa, blamed their mothers for their overbearing nature, and for being in love with another man. "My mother was always yelling for this or that; my father couldn't take it anymore (Jeanne)." "My mother fell in love with another man (Aifa)." All in all, these reasons explained why daughters didn't feel responsible for their parents' divorce.

#### Chances and/or Difficulties Encountered

In a similar fashion, the data on "the changes and/or difficulties" daughters recalled being faced with vary, accordingly, to high and low conflict home situations. At the present time, evidence suggests that it is not necessarily the occurrence of parental conflict, but rather the occurrence of parental conflict in the presence of the child that is associated with the most detrimental effects on children

(Hetherington and Arastesh, 1988,156). "...The proportion of children reported to have had a seriously upsetting experience is highest for those whose parents' relationships are characterized by high conflict (Peterson and Zill, 1986,295). For instance, Anna and Stacey (who come from low conflict homes) respectively report their difficulties dealt with: "Learning to live without my father and seeing him only a few times a year cause he moved to another province. That was really hard. I missed him terribly (Anna)." ""Moving, changing neighbourhood, just being me and my mom. Missing my father...(Stacey)".

On the other hand, Marie, Roxanne, Jeanne, Laura, Jenna, Paulina and Virginia (who come from high conflict homes) indicate experiencing many more difficulties: "All I remember during that time is how much I hated my father; I had so much anger. Dealing with these feelings was the hardest (Jenna)." Paulina says:

"I was sick of hearing my dad berate my mother. I was sick to death of his speeches which were all aimed at saving me from becoming like her. Then, on the other side, when I did something wrong, whatever, I was bad in math or talked back, my mother would sarcastically say: You're really your father's daughter. Either way you can't win!"

"Being caught in their battles has (and still does) forced me to play both sides, lie over and over (Marie)." Another common problem amongst daughters was dealing with fears of betraying one parent or the other and all the problems associated with divided loyalties: "It was as if I would betray her if I told her I loved my dad or even had fun with him or worse, with his wife (Jeanne)". "Feeling guilty about seeing my father was the worse thing. So I'd see him without my mother's knowledge (Roxanne)."

In addition, dealing with all the complexities of a new step-parent, and sometimes step-family is another difficulty. Virginia reveals:

"Having to deal with two families and all the problems it entails: the animosity they had for each other, step-siblings who disliked me no matter what; a stepmother who believed she knew better than my mother; a father who knew everything and better than my mother and who never stopped reminding me of it; my mom's fear that I would prefer my stepmother; dealing with her insecurities; my mother's boyfriend trying to impose his rules and discipline...".

Seen from the perspective of children, familial relationships become even more complicated when parents remarry (Furstenberg and Nord, 1986,893; Eichler, 1988,265).

On the other hand, Lina, along with Mikasa, Victoria and Veronica, expressed relief and happiness as a result of their parents' divorce. "The divorce was the best thing for me and my mother, since my old man is still an alcoholic. Neither of us care to this day what happens to him. His abuses are painful memories (Lina)." Victoria adds: "My mother started being happy, we started breathing...living. we were no longer living in fear." As is indicated in the literature on children of divorce: "Few youngsters experience relief with divorce decision, and those who do have witnessed physical violence between their parents (Wolchik and Karoly, 1988,45).

Although the responses varied in intensity, common themes echoed throughout this section. The majority of daughters report that parental conflict as well as dealing with an emotionally distressed mother were described as the most problematic (because of all the series of problems it entails). "If my mother hadn't hated my father so much and if both families would not have harboured hostilities, my life would have been a

whole lot easier and happier (Virginia)." "I probably wouldr.'t have developed asthma attacks nor migraines if my parents would have stopped fighting and if my mother hadn't been so miserable (Jenna)." Paulina adds: "Mom would become very aggressive and twist my arm till it would hurt so much I would have to struggle to make her let go."

"One significant change in children's lives following the parents' divorce may be that their mother's emotional wellbeing is in greater jeopardy" (Eichler, 1988,245). No doubt this affects daughters. Laura states: "my mother complained so much about the divorce and the grief my father caused her, hence her unhappiness became my own. That's probably what made my parents' divorce so difficult." To Laura, her parent's divorce meant living with a very hurt and unhappy mother who never stopped reminding Laura of the pain she felt. Consequently, Laura reported feeling her mother's pain as if it was her own. Hence, she reported this has negatively affected the relationship with her father. For her mother's resentment towards him became her own, and no matter how hard she tried to get close to her father, she just could not do it. In turn, this affected her "level of maladjustment". Clair Berman found that "...in interviews with adults who were the children of divorce, we hear echoes. The same experiences are repeated, the same feelings described...(Berman, 1990,20).

Sometimes, children of divorce are faced with years and years of fighting between their parents even after the divorce has been granted (Berman, 1990,148). And because most ex-spouses rarely maintain a good relationship (nor do they co-operate in their parental roles), children of divorce often find themselves having to side with one parent or, as

the majority of daughters reported, play both sides, meaning they have to "put on performances", a term which may be defined "...as all activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants; a show put on for the benefit of other people" (Goffman, 1959,15-17). "I'd try to be a good little girl so that my father could love me and be proud of me (Virginia)." "I'd tell my father how men at school would fall all over themselves for me to show him that, although he didn't love me, I could be loved by other men (Frances)."

Like daughters Jenna, Jeanne, Paulina, Marie, Virginia and others have reported, a performance or an act must be put on in order not to betray either parent, not be seen as a traitor by them nor not to lose their love. Indeed, these are not uncommon phenomena amongst children of divorce; some daughters go as far as putting on "the good little girl" act or routine in an attempt to receive love from their father (Berman, 1990,136).

Having to deal with the divorce of one's parents, with their remarriages and with all the issues which arise from those situations is already quite complex, according to the majority of daughters, but having to deal with two divorces and two remarriages just doubles the difficulties, according to Roxanne and Paulina, who are two of the four daughters (the others are Jenna and Dina) in this sample whose fathers remarried a second time. Roxanne explains:

"The first time my father remarried, it was expected. His new wife had no children. My father was available for me. But when he remarried a second time, she had two little kids and I felt like I had lost my place. I was so hurt and angry. I was his biological child, I felt I had a right over those kids. It's like I had suddenly become unimportant".

Roxanne also explained that she perceived her father's first remarriage as a "let down", another abandonment (in the same way she first perceived divorce). But she was reassured of the opposite when her father maintained regular contact. However, with the second remarriage, the contact became scarce, and although she admits her father explicitly told her that he wasn't rejecting her, she still felt he did. As a result, Roxanne reports having a very tumultuous relationship with her father.

Similarly, Paulina adds: "It's like you become a thing of the past, suddenly disposable. It's something you never really swallow." Research on effects of second and third remarriages on children is virtually non-existent. What research has indeed told us is that in a remarriage, not only do more individuals have to adjust to each other, but the emotional atmosphere itself is more complicated than in the first marriage (Furstenberg and Spanier, 1984; Baker, 1990). The situation may be particularly difficult as ex-spouses remain around (when there are children), often causing friction for the entire family.

And when the ex-husband remarries first, evidence to date suggests it is common that his new marriage bring about a renewal of hostilities with his children and his children's mother. As the father restructures his new family, his children experience new fears, such as the fear of being replaced or abandoned by the father, and they usually end up reflecting reality.

Furstenberg has characterized the pattern of child care after divorce and remarriage as "a system of child swapping", whereby fathers exchange one set of children for another (Furstenberg, 1988, 258-59).



This is even more pronounced when mothers remarry. Furstenberg explains: "some noncustodial parents are uncomfortable with their marginal role to begin with, and they are inclined to retreat from significant involvement with a child altogether when a step-parent enters the scene (Furstenberg and Spanier, 1984,112).

The structural complexity of remarriage, combined with the lack of appropriate norms, the possible clashing of two different family cultures, the feelings of loyalty to current and prior family members, the differing perceptions of how family time, energy, mutual goods and affection should be shared, the additional actors and the discrepancy between marital and parental roles, render the bi-nuclear family highly vulnerable to a huge number of stresses (Ahrons and Rodgers, 1987,157). Remarriages will be further discussed in the next chapter. Remarriages are affected by previous marital experience, as well as by the presence or absence of children of one or both marital partners and of new partners (Eichler, 1988,27).

Roxanne reported not having any problem with her first dad's remarriage. His first wife had no children and her father was still available for her. Yet, in her father's second remarriage, children are present and it seems, as Furstenberg explained, that sociological parenthood takes precedence over biological parenthood. Roxanne expresses something that Clair Berman reported is common amongst children of divorce: "a sense of having missed out on something that is a birthright, the right to grow up in a house with two parents" (Berman, 1990).

Likewise, Paulina's fears that her father would no longer be available also became reality. To most children, father's presence, availability, and visits represent the depth of his love and commitment, especially in the period following the divorce. "It's obvious he didn't want me or love me, for if he had, we would have heard of him after the divorce (Michelle)." The frequency of the visiting itself becomes a significant measure, and the children keep a careful count (Hetherington and Arastesh, 1987; Berman, 1990). "I knew my father loved me, for he saw me promptly, every two weeks, and he called me regularly to see how I was doing (Olivia). "My father never stopped loving me; he showed it by attending my ballet shows, parents' night at school. I could always count on him to be there (Stacey)."

As is common for the majority of children of divorce, and as was the case for the majority of daughters in this sample, the father's sudden unavailability signifies rejection, anger, pain, low self-esteem. "Daughters see themselves as unlovable and replaceable because of their father's abrupt loss of interest in them" (Berman, 1990,243). These painful feelings felt by children as a result of their father's unavailability are not only specific to children of divorce, but to all children in general. And in turn, they have serious implications on the relationships children end up having with their fathers, as well as affecting themselves personally (low self-esteem, difficulties in having relations with members of opposite sex).

The US Department of Health and Welfare, has reported:

"In effect, what we are witnessing is a huge withdrawal (or rejection as the case may be) of men from their father roles...the majority of fathers (with of course, notable exceptions) are not significantly involved in childrearing, whether or not they are married to the mother of their children" (1988,272).

This is not a pretty picture, but one which is reflected in this sample, regardless of the parents' marital status.

#### The availability of the father

Like research on the effects of divorce on children, the results of research on father absence are complex. While for children whose father is absent, some studies have found negative effects, many have not. Frank Furstenberg found that contact with the outside parent had no general effect, either positive or negative, on children's well-being. He explains that this may be due to the fact that relatively few outside parents see their children frequently enough to exert much influence (1988,256).

Some studies have reported the positive effects of having the father absent from the family. For example, regular contact between the child and nonresidential father may, in many cases, increase conflict between the ex-spouses, which could adversely effect the child (Furstenberg and Spanier, 1984,114; Furstenberg, 1987,6). And of course, if the father is abusive and violent, as in the cases of Lina, Mikasa, Victoria and Veronica, father absence can only have positive effects.

Other studies have found that fathers who maintained contact with children after divorce minimized the negative impact of divorce, and indeed brought positive effects for the children involved (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980,454; Berman, 1990,227; Baker, 1990,204). Olivia: "I saw my dad regularly after my parents' divorce, and it made the situation a

whole lot less difficult." Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) have found the following:

"A potent force links the child's self-esteem with continued contact with the father in the postdivorce family...there is a significant connection between low self-esteem and depression in the child, and continued disappointment with the father's infrequent or erratic visiting" (1980,454).

Unfortunately, fathers maintaining regular contact with their children after divorce is rarely the case in this sample. Only a very few get to see their father on a regular basis. The majority of responses in this sample clearly reflect the studies which report father absence as bringing on negative effects. An overwhelming number of daughters report having been negatively affected by their father's absence, one way or another. Virginia says:

"For a very long time, I felt unlovable, insecure, and undesirable...I felt that if he was not interested in my life, I would probably end up alone. I was scared to death of being rejected by another man and therefore, I terminated every relationship which got too close for comfort, based on that fear".

Virginia's perception of her father's absence as rejection resulted in her fearing rejection by other males. Therefore, she perceived that since her father had rejected her, every other man she who would get too close to would eventually do the same. So, in order not to re-experience the pain of rejection, she terminated every relationship which became too close for comfort.

Roxanne adds: "Of course I was affected. How can you not be? Your father is no longer physically present in your home. You have to deal with a depressed, hurt and resentful mother." But, as Furstenberg has pointed out, the problems of parental conflict and enduring hostilities are evidently not dampened by maintaining regular contact. Indeed, this

is one of the negative effects of having a father present. Olivia, Jeanne and Virginia have clearly stated they need to put on performances for their parents' sake. "In front of my mother, I had to pretend I had a bad time when I saw my father, so she wouldn't be hurt or angry (Olivia)." In similarity to the research which indicates that the majority of fathers see their children infrequently if not at all after the divorce, the responses in this sample clearly depict the same pattern.

TABLE #4

RELATIONSHIP WITH FATHER BY AVAILABILITY OF FATHER

Relationship With Father	Availability of Father		
	Available	Unavailable	
Not Close	—	12	12
Close	5	1	6
Very Close	1	1	2
Total	6	14	20

Availability of the father was defined as emotional, financial and social support given by the father. It was measured by asking the question: was your father available for you after your parent's divorce? In what way was he available to you (emotional, financial, social)? Those daughters whose father maintained regular contact as well as bringing them some or all of the said support reported him as being

available. While those daughters whose father did not maintain contact nor provide any form of support reported him as being unavailable.

The type of "relationship with father" categories reflect the responses daughters gave with regard to the following question which measured the daughter-father relationship: How close were you to your father? What was the level of intimacy?

There were obvious divisions amongst the responses. For instance, those daughters who reported "not having a close relationship" with their father stated that he was not there for them. Some reported having a relationship of courtesy. A few revealed not wanting to have anything to do with their father due to his abusive nature. Other stated their father was never part of their lives, not financially, emotionally nor socially.

Those who reported having close relationships with their father explicitly said their father was available to them in all the ways a friend would be available: in an emotional, financial and social way. In fact, most reported either seeing their father or speaking to him regularly. They also reported having a close relationship like they would have with a friend.

Lastly, the two daughters who were grouped in the "very close" category explicitly said they were closer to their dad than to their mother. They also revealed that their father was probably one of the persons to whom they were the closest.

Table #4 indicates that only a few fathers are available for their daughters. It describes the type of relationship daughters report having with their father after divorce in terms of their father's

availability. This table tells us that all the daughters who report not having a close relationship had unavailable fathers. Of the 8 daughters who report close or very close relationships, 6 report that their father was available. The two exceptions are Aifa and Anna, who remained close to their fathers despite their unavailability (due to their geographic location), mainly because both fathers called and wrote regularly. That is, they were socially but not physically available.

The majority of fathers are rarely available for several reasons: some are workaholics, others simply consider that sending alimony suffices, some are simply not interested, others live outside of the country or province. But, for the most part, fathers have new families which keeps them busy. And regrettably, many don't want to invest the time in dealing with all the intricacies of blending their daughter to their newly formed families.

Although some fathers see their daughters once a month and do in fact integrate them into their new families, this was not the case for the majority of daughters in this sample: out of the 8 daughters who reveal being close to their father, 6 mentioned not seeing their father nearly as often as they would have liked to. Laura says: "I wished I could have seen my father more."

Although these daughters regularly saw their father, the majority report having experienced various difficulties with the visitations for all sorts of reasons. "I had to deal with my mother's insecurities upon returning from spending time with my father (Olivia)." "I tried to fit in my father's new house and family, and yet felt like a stranger (Virginia)." "Even when the heads of both houses get along, their

children are likely to experience visitation as a mixed bag of pleasure and pain" (Berman, 1990,144).

The responses daughters of divorce gave on father availability clearly indicate that those who get to see their fathers regularly are the minority. This is the case when they were both children and adults. The majority of daughters either see their father a few times a year, get a telephone call on occasion or simply do not see him at all. In addition, fourteen fathers are remarried (four of whom are remarried for the second time), in contrast to eight mothers: the other twelve mothers are in common-law unions. This finding reflects the evidence to date which indicates that men are more likely to remarry than women (Baker, 1990,205).

Table #5 describes daughters' level of maladjustment after divorce, as previously defined in chapter 4, in terms of father's availability. Of the 12 daughters who report having high maladjustment after divorce, 10 had unavailable fathers. While of the 8 who reported no or low maladjustment, half had fathers available. Paternal availability is therefore obviously a significant factor in daughters' adjustment. Furthermore, the four daughters who had unavailable fathers and who reported no maladjustment all had abusive fathers. And although Virginia and Roxanne had available fathers, they nevertheless reported high levels of maladjustment due to ongoing parental conflicts, and various problems arising from visitations.

In addition, the responses reported by daughters on the effects of father absence are not uncommon to the population of children of divorce (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989). For instance, Paulina, Roxanne and



Virginia reported that what was painful about their father's absence was his non-interest in their life and in themselves. Virginia added that "it might have made a difference during those years to know he still thought about me".

TABLE #5

LEVEL OF MALADJUSTMENT AFTER DIVORCE  
BY AVAILABILITY OF THE FATHER

Level of Maladjustment	Availability of the Father		
	Available	Unavailable	
No maladjustment	1	4	5
Low Maladjustment	3	—	3
High Maladjustment	2	10	12
Total	6	14	20

According to many daughters, "being unloved by a parent, or even feeling that you are unloved, leaves scars (Marie)." Another burden several daughters reported having which is carried over from father absence is low self-esteem. As with problems of anger or feelings of unworthiness, low self-esteem shows itself in many ways. "If your father doesn't make you feel that he loves you, you do not like yourself, and you find it hard to trust others", Michelle states. It is reflected in the literature, "that children of divorce, especially women, struggle to not only love themselves but to trust others" (Berman, 1990,33).

In this sample a few reported struggling with men and relationships; such was the case with Virginia, Jenna and Paulina. Jenna says: "Every man who lays eyes on you has got to love you. A father is the one person in your life who has to love you and if he rejects you, there has to be something wrong with you." Jenna perceived her father's rejection as being her fault. She strongly believed, and to some extent still does today, that if she had been smarter, prettier, or in some way more lovable, her father would not have rejected her. Jenna reports that these feelings of inferiority, combined with low levels of self-esteem has negatively affected her. For instance, she reported engaging in early sexual activity in search of male affection, only to be hurt. She never felt good enough to compete in any contest or sports. And she never felt interesting enough to try and make friends, for fear individuals would laugh at her. She adds: "growing up was hard, painful and lonely."

Clair Berman explains that it is common for daughters of divorce to react negatively towards relationships. Since they feel so unlovable, they think "there must be something wrong with any man who has shown the poor judgement to be interested in them" (1990,33). Evidence to date has also suggested that "adolescent daughters are likely to seek sexual partners for comfort or to turn inward as a way of dealing with feelings of rejection, loss and loneliness brought on by father absence" (Berman, 1990,126). "I needed so much to be loved, it's like I had a void which just yearned for my father's love. But since that was to no avail, I searched for it elsewhere (Virginia)".

However, problems with oneself and with relationships involving members of the opposite sex were not the only difficulties daughters reported having as a result of their father's absence. Dealing with a distressed mother was a common experience, for an absent father also means a husbandless mother (at least temporarily) with all the additional stress this implies (Lynn, 1984,256). Difficulties with divided loyalties and step-families were other frequent responses. Olivia, Jeanne, and Roxanne all mentioned they wished they could have enjoyed seeing their fathers without being made to feel guilty or being seen as a traitor. Although the majority of daughters report having been negatively affected by their father's absence, there were, on the other hand, some daughters, such as Mikasa, Victoria, Veronica and Lina, who were positively affected by it.

#### Relationship with parents

Studies indicate that children of divorced parents have a better prognosis when the custodial parent is emotionally stable, provides love and a structured life, and when the non-custodial parent maintains a regular relationship with the child and is supportive of the custodial parent. Regrettably, the reality is that most divorced parents parent separately, a phenomenon Furstenberg (1987) has referred to as "parallel parenting". Parents rarely co-operate in their parental roles (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985), leaving children caught in the middle of two parallel worlds, which more often than not collide at their expense.

The majority of daughters reported their father was unavailable. And for the few who saw their father on occasion, it often proved to be problematic. Frances explains: "There was such tension and

uncomfortableness, sometimes I wondered if it was worth it at all." In addition, complaints and problems about visitations and fathers were very common amongst daughters of divorce. This is reflective of the literature on children of divorce, which reveal that children are in general much closer and contented with their mother than with their father (Peterson and Zill, 1986,298). Marie recalls:

"He made so few efforts to be with me during those times; and when we did see each other, he would buy me things. Didn't he know that I didn't want presents? All I wanted was his love."

For Marie, the fact that her father was buying gifts meant he was trying to make up for lost time, thinking he could buy his way back into her life and heal all past wounds. But instead of eliciting positive feelings for Marie, it only made her more angry. As a result, Marie reported having a very "rocky" relationship with her father after the divorce, and still does so today.

It is not uncommon for non-custodial fathers to become what has been called "The Disneyland Dad". Fathers try to compensate for their absence with presents in an attempt to seek forgiveness, earn approval, ease their own conscience (and/or guilt) and receive love from their children (Lamb, 1987,128). Furstenberg and Nord (1985) have indicated that contact with the outside parent, if it occurs at all, is usually social or recreational. The role of the outside parent is normally confined to entertainment; the outside parent plays a very limited role (1985,896-97). Residential parents disproportionately assume the responsibility of childcare (Berman, 1990; Baker, 1990).

During the period that follows divorce, the majority of daughters reported getting closer to their mothers, while they moved away from

their fathers. One of the major reasons being the level of conflict (the hostility parents harbour for each another). Virginia states: "It's like they can't overcome their hurt, and you're left with a situation which you have absolutely no control over. Hence, you end up losing a parent to another in the process." Stacey states an important point: "I was and still am close to both of my parents. I was lucky, my parents never dragged me into their problems."

Table #6 describes the relationship daughters report having with their fathers in terms of the level of conflict (as previously defined in chapter 4). It tells us that all daughters who report not being close to their fathers all come from high conflict homes.

TABLE #6  
RELATIONSHIP WITH FATHER BY LEVEL OF CONFLICT

Relationship With Father	Level of Conflict		
	High	Low	
Not Close	12	—	12
Close	2	4	6
Very Close	1	1	2
Total	15	5	20

Of those 8 daughters who report having a close relationship with their fathers, 5 come from low conflict homes. And only 3 daughters who come from the 15 high conflict homes report having a close and/or very

close relationship with their fathers. The one daughter who says she is "very close" explains:

"My father and I were always close; he never stopped telling me he loved me. The problems he had were between my mom and him. He maintained contact throughout, and I had no reason not to remain very close to him."

Evidence collected in this research seems to support the finding that in the majority of families, marital disruption effectively (and for some at least temporarily) destroys the ongoing relationship between the daughter and her biological parent (usually the father) living outside the home (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985,902).

#### Summary

In sum, the majority of daughters knew there was something wrong with their parents' marriage; those few who did not know came from low conflict homes. Moreover, none of the daughters felt responsible for their parents' divorce. The emotional health of the mothers, and parental conflict, were two problems the majority of daughters reported as being the most difficult to deal with.

The difficulties were far more numerous for daughters coming from high conflict homes; they had to deal with ongoing parental conflicts, problems of divided loyalties, emotionally distressed mothers (who remained so for extended periods of time) and, more often than not, a totally absent father. A few daughters revealed not having any difficulty with their parents' divorce. Usually they came from abusive backgrounds, with the exception of one daughter whose parents worked cooperatively after the divorce.

For the majority of daughters, remarriages appear to further complicate the situation as well as stress the parent-child relationships, raise fears of abandonment and replacement and, more often than not, annihilate the relationship with the biological father. Fathers' remarriages are even more difficult for children of divorce if the mother was not involved or remarried at the time, and if the father did not continue to maintain contact. Those daughters whose fathers remarried twice seemed to experience the most difficulties.

Fathers are by no means available for the majority of daughters after divorce; and typically, their unavailability worsens if they remarry or if their former spouses do so. And an overwhelming number of daughters reported having been negatively affected by their father's absence and/or unavailability. As a result, only 8 daughters out of 20 report sharing close relationships with their fathers, and only six see their fathers regularly.

## CHAPTER 6

### TODAY

#### Coping Mechanisms

This section examines coping mechanisms daughters utilized in dealing with parental divorce. Daughters reported using a wide variety of coping techniques. Some used therapy and/or counselling: half of the women in this sample did at one time seek some form of help from social therapists, psychiatrists, social workers and/or psychologists. However, only four reported seeking this form of help as a direct result of their parents' divorce. Quite a few daughters got involved with alcohol and/or drugs (for 3 to 24 month periods). Others reported engaging in early sexual activity and using sex as a means of getting both male affection and as a coping mechanism. None of these activities are unique to daughters of divorce, of course, but these women did relate their behaviour to the divorces. Two respondents coped by secretly and regularly seeing their fathers. Several daughters coped through support systems, and some claimed they did not have to cope with their parents' divorce, for it was either the best thing that ever happened to them or (as one daughter reported) parents worked in a cooperative fashion.

The majority of daughters stated they had to cope with various factors emanating from their parents' divorce: "Dealing with my mother's mood swings, violent temper and aggressive behaviour (Virginia)."  
"Coping with my feelings toward my father and with my mother's insecurities vis-a-vis the relationship with my father (Roxanne)."  
"Coping with my parents' resentment for one another (Jenna)."



Moreover, the majority of daughters found support systems to be crucial in helping them through some difficult times: "It's important to have someone who can be supportive and simply listen to you rather than judge you (Paulina)". For some respondents, support was found through grandparents: "My grandparents allowed me to express my feelings without rebuttal. I needed to let out all the anger I felt for my father (Michelle)". And quite a few mentioned having the support of their mothers, aunts, uncles and friends: "I was lucky my mother was very supportive and always willing to listen (Marie)."

Other daughters reported having coped with certain feelings emanating from their parents' divorce through having temporarily explored with sex at an early age, drugs and alcohol.

"I investigated with the opposite sex quite early. I wanted to be loved, and I wanted to show my dad I could get a man to love me. I was desperate to show the world that there wasn't anything wrong with me (Virginia)".

Jeanne took drugs for a period of a year: "For a short while, it made some of the pain go away." Veronica got involved with alcohol for a period of two years: "It felt good because I could forget everything and reinvent my past." Veronica reported that when she thought of alcohol, she thought of peace and of a new life, like she was being reborn. Drinking meant she was in a new world, one free of pain and full of love and happiness. This was her way of dealing with her pain and her father's abusive behaviour.

Furthermore, whether daughters had support or sought therapy, some daughters, such as Roxanne and Jenna, reported that the coping never ends (with the exception of a few, like Victoria, whose parents' divorce signified the end of a nightmare). According to Jenna: "It's part of an

ongoing process; a parents' divorce and all it entails is never over."

And Roxanne, who had the even more troublesome experience of seeing her father marry a third time, states: "There is never a distinct beginning or end, nor a clear boundary whereby one can say it's over."

Although the majority of daughters said they had no major problems with their parents' marital status today, the previous responses suggest that it was not always the case. Jenna defined divorce as "an unstoppable chain of dominos; as one falls, so does another and another till the end of the link, but with your parent's divorce, there is no end to the link". Frances exclaims: "It seems there's always something else to deal with; when you think you have a handle on it, something happens that throws you off balance".

While some daughters adjust after their parents' divorce, others do not. "Having been choked by my mother's hatred for my father and having suffered from severe migraines and asthma attacks, I ended up in the hospital and eventually, underwent therapeutic care (Virginia)." Like Virginia, some daughters require medical and/or professional help, and with it thereafter adjust. But some still do not adjust, and thereby remain affected. For example, Mikasa reveals having difficulties in establishing relationships with men for fear of being abused: "Still to this day, I have flashbacks of those frightful times. It took me 23 years before I was able to trust a man, and it still is very difficult." Jenna adds: "I'm still caught between my parents' hatred and I will probably never be free of it till death does them part."

The literature on children of divorce reflects this variety in post-divorce adjustment (Berman, 1990). Daughters who have been very

affected and are still coping with their parents' divorce came from high conflict homes, where their parents argued for years after the divorce was granted. Others who indicated that their father had been remarried a second time (and was since then rarely available) had a particularly difficult time. Studies of children's adjustment to marital breakup "stress the importance of a healthy postdivorce environment, one where there is among other factors, high involvement by the non-custodial parent, a low level of discord between the parents and cooperative parenting with consistency" (Berman, 1990,95).

Unfortunately, this mix of variables are but rarely reflected in reality. In this sample, only one reflects such a mix: Stacey. She reports: "Both my parents were very supportive, I was fortunate since my parents did not harbour any anger nor did they fight or use me as their pawn." The research indicates however that Stacey's parents are not typical (Eichler, 1988; Baker, 1990).

Others, such as Mikasa, Veronica and Victoria reported not needing any help, for their parents' divorce was just what was needed (all of them came from abusive backgrounds). However, four daughters (Roxanne, Jenna, Paulina and Virginia) reported seeking professional help as a result of their parents' marital dissolution. Jenna and Virginia both sought help because of pressures resulting from ongoing parental conflict. Jenna states: "Well, it's not coping with my parents' divorce, but rather everything that follows. I mean, still to this day I'm coping." Roxanne and Paulina were both very affected by their father's abandonment, not only after the divorce, but again after the first and second remarriages:

"I will never get over the pain my father made me feel as a little girl, nor the hurt he still makes me feel today; he rejected me then, and now he has replaced me with stepchildren (Paulina)."

"It's like I became a non-person to him, like I was erased from his mind; and stupidly, I clung to this hope that one day, he would be interested in me. You just keep getting hurt and feel the same pain all over again (Roxanne)."

All four of these daughters revealed not having a support system, and two explained being choked by their parents' conflict and their feelings of guilt and divided loyalties. And Paulina needed help dealing with her rage and/or anger with regards to her father.

The remaining six women in this sample sought professional help at one point in their lives, but all for different reasons, which they claim were not a direct result of their parents' divorce. For instance, some sought help because they wanted someone (outside of the family) with whom they could talk to. Olivia said: "I couldn't talk to my mother; she was too angry with my father for leaving, and I was too angry at him for being gay. I just needed to talk to someone who wasn't related to us." "I needed help in order to learn to let go of the pain and learn how to deal with it (Roxanne)."

For the ten women who had some form of therapy and/or professional help at one point in their lives, it lasted from six to 12 months. Exceptions are two daughters who had therapy for two to two and a half years due to traumatic experiences, such as seeing their mothers being badly beaten (as well as being beaten themselves) repeatedly over a period of time by their fathers. Of those women who had some form of therapy, most found it useful.

All in all, those daughters who had a support system, or people they could turn to, said it was priceless. Some daughters like Paulina

and Olivia, were not so fortunate, and therefore, turned to some form of professional help for support. While others turned to professional help out of necessity. Nevertheless, not everyone requires some form of medical and/or professional help, for half of the women in this sample said they resolved their problems in part or entirely on their own; while some reported having the help of some support system, and others reported being better off once their parents divorced than they previously were.

Lastly, it is important to note that the majority of women (18) report faring well today and being contented with their live, while only two report still having a lot of pain and unresolved issues to deal with regarding their fathers.

#### Remarriages

The majority of daughters reported experiencing, at one point or another, difficulties with their parents' remarriages, and some reveal still experiencing them today (particularly those four daughters whose fathers have remarried a second time).

Because not all of the respondents' parents have remarried, the responses (on their present marital status as well as the problems it entails) are quite diverse. Parents' remarriages are broken down as follows: seven daughters had parents who were both remarried; two daughters had parents both of whom have not remarried; and another 11 respondents have one of their parents remarried. Thus, the majority (18) of respondents have at least one of their parents remarried. This is reflective of the statistics on remarriages which indicate that 75% of all divorces end in marriage" (Ahrons and Rodgers, 1987,157).

In general, those daughters whose parents remarried expressed more problems with their father's remarriage than with their mother's: "My mother didn't drop out of the picture or stopped caring or loving me when she got remarried (Paulina)"; "I knew my mother would always be there for me and that she would love me just the same. But with my father, I just didn't know what to expect (Nastasia)". Perhaps this fear and insecurity vis-a-vis their fathers' remarriages can be in part explained by the fact that in the sample, there were no children present from the new husbands in the mothers' remarriage, but there were in the fathers' remarriage. Daughters felt threatened and feared their father would forget about them. Virginia states:

"It was so hard to see my father display affection to these girls who weren't even from his own blood. It was even harder knowing they had the chance to live with him and get closer to him while I was slipping away from him. It killed me inside".

Eight subjects reported fear of being abandoned by their father due to their father's new wife or children. Roxanne reports: "It's a very real and painful fear that of losing one's father and it's even more so when you feel you've lost him to another stranger's children"; "it really hurts to know your father cares for other children and not for his own (Paulina)". Unless, as Nastasia indicated, the father maintains regular contact with his children and plays an active role in their life, this fear of abandonment will continue to torment many children, and they are likely to continue reporting more difficulties with their father's remarriage than with their mother's.

For those daughters who had one parent who remarried, it is usually the father. The majority of daughters reported experiencing various difficulties with their parents' remarriages: "My mother didn't

want me to see my father as much once he remarried. It created a series of new problems. I had to lie and sneak out to see my father (Jeanne)"; "Dealing with my stepfathers' rules and discipline was difficult, after all he wasn't my father (Marie)"; "Seeing my father hug or kiss his step-children was the most difficult (Jenna)". Some daughters reveal still experiencing difficulties as a result of their parents' remarriage today.

"There's always something, whether it's deciding where you'll spend the Easter holiday. Someone will always lose out or be angry, hurt, disappointed. Having to then deal with that really wears you out (Roxanne)".

In short, the majority of daughters reported being happy with their present parents' marital status, whether remarried, involved, or single: "My mother remarried and it was the greatest day of my life (Michelle)." For Michelle, her mother's remarriage meant a new beginning, not just for her mother, but for herself too. She reported feeling a tremendous urge that she could now get on with her life, rather than constantly worrying about her mother. In fact, shortly after her mother remarried, Michelle moved out on her own. She admits this would never have been possible before. Anna adds: "I'm thrilled that my father found someone with whom he's finally happy (Anna); "It's great to see your mother happy after having seen her unhappy for so very long (Celine)".

Of those who were not satisfied, many daughters expressed a desire for their mother to eventually remarry: "I wished my mother would remarry, she's been with the same man for 16 years (Laura)"; "I would love for my mother to remarry, as for my father, well, I don't think gay men will be allowed to marry anytime soon (Olivia)".

It is worth mentioning that although many women reported encountering problems at one point in time with the remarriage of a parent, particularly with their father's remarriage, these difficulties were for the most part resolved. Only a few reported still experiencing many difficulties today: "My parents still badmouth each other at times, placing me in compromising situations (Jenna)"; "My mother still feels threatened by the relationship I have with my father and his wife; it's an irreversible situation (Virginia)". "It gets very difficult at times, because I maintain a relationship with my father's second wife and he forbids me to. I don't get along with his third wife who is hostile towards me and my mother (Roxanne)". Indeed, those daughters who still experience difficulties find themselves caught between parental conflicts, two families who are hostile to one another, or involved in a third family (the father's second remarriage).

Daughters have indicated that their feelings pertaining to parents' remarriages have changed over time. Virginia reports: "I didn't always feel so comfortable or happy with my parents' current marital status." "With time, I learned to know my father's wife and understood what he saw in her (Anna)." Through time and experience, daughters have modified their behaviour through reinterpretation and redefinition: "Human behaviour is emergent, continually constructed during its execution" (Blumer, 1969,82). Daughters' perceptions have changed because they have defined and reinterpreted continuously their parents' acts, such as father's absence, parent's remarriage. As a result, the consequences of such acts have also changed.



"I've accepted the situation, for although it gets difficult at times, my father seems happy and even if we don't see him often enough, he calls us regularly. I guess some stuff goes down easier with time (Roxanne)".

"After a while, you learn to live with it. You have your life and they have theirs. You end up trying to make the best of what seemed for the longest time an uncomfortable and undesirable situation (Laura)".

In addition, daughters learned to know their step-parent, assimilate or adapt to new circumstances, get over fears and insecurities and know where one stands in another's life after certain transitions, such as that of remarriage. "It was only after my father maintained regular visits and kept on calling me every week that his remarriage didn't affect me as it had prior to finding out about it (Nastasia)".

Another factor that helped some daughters view their fathers' marital status differently is the fact that the mother had found someone: "I wasn't so bothered by my fathers' remarriage when my mother finally found someone who was good to her and who made her happy (Dina)"; "When my mother remarried it made a lot of the grief less painful, because I felt like it was a new beginning to a happy life for both myself, my siblings and my mother (Paulina)".

In contrast, those whose mother had not remarried appeared to be more negatively affected by their father's remarriage: "It really hurt to know my father was remarried and happy while my mother was still mourning. How I would have wanted her to find someone (Laura)." For Laura, her father's remarriage was not a happy occasion because all she could see was a grieving mother. In turn, Laura revealed not being able to feel happy for her father and more importantly, decided she wouldn't

be part of her father's new life. After her father's remarriage, she hardly saw her father.

Likewise, it is indicated in the literature on children of divorce that mothers finding new love often aided some daughters to respond more favourably to their father's marital status, and even more when their mother were remarried: "...the remarriage of the mother is associated with an improvement in the relationship with the father, whether absent or not" (Peterson and Zill, 1986,298-99).

Table #7 describes the level of maladjustment daughters reported having after divorce in terms of whether the mother was remarried or not. Mothers' remarriages were measured by asking the question: Is your mother remarried? Common-law unions were not regarded as marriages by daughters of divorce. Therefore, those mothers who were in common-law unions were placed in the "unremarried" category. Thus, Table #7 reflects daughters' perceptions of reality which are not at all congruent with the legal reality. According to Quebec law, women who are in common-law unions are legally married. Also, there is no evidence that these mothers do not perceive themselves as married.

Table #7 tells us that 75% of the daughters who reported having high maladjustment after divorce, had unremarried mothers; whereas of the 8 daughters who reported no or low adjustment problems, five (63%) had mothers who remarried. The mothers remarriage therefore seems to be associated with ease of adjustment.

Fathers maintaining regular contact proved to be both crucial to post-divorce adjustment of daughters in this sample: "My dad made me know he'd always be there for me, and he called me regularly so that I

wouldn't forget it. Therefore, I never felt abandoned or rejected (Anna)". Fathers maintaining contact reassured many daughters

TABLE #7

LEVEL OF MALADJUSTMENT AFTER DIVORCE  
BY MOTHER'S REMARRIAGE

Level of Maladjustment	Remarried or Not		
	Remarried	Unremarried	
No maladjustment	3	2	5
Low Maladjustment	2	1	3
High Maladjustment	3	9	12
Total	8	12	20

that although they had a new wife and sometimes step-children, they nevertheless had time for them and they would continue to be a central part of their life. Indeed, some of the literature indicates that children of divorce who see their father regularly are affected less negatively than children who do not have contact with their biological fathers (Furstenberg, 1985,903).

Also, a few daughters mentioned that being loved by someone and having that person there by one's side has been a big help to them and how they handled and coped with the remarriage of a parent: "Having someone besides your parents with whom you can be intimate and happy with and who supports you makes a hell of a difference on your ability to cope with life in general (Virginia)." Frances states: "When I fell

in love and it was reciprocal, it was like I was being reborn and all the past wounds had disappeared."

Similarly, the literature on children of divorce indicates that having the support of a loved one other than the parents, has been found extremely helpful in the way adult children of divorce cope and or perceive certain life events (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989; Berman, 1990).

Table #8 describes the type of contact daughters reported having with their fathers in terms of whether their father had remarried or not.

TABLE #8  
TYPE OF FATHER CONTACT  
BY FATHER REMARRIAGE

Father Contact	Remarried or Not		
	Remarried	Unremarried	
Regularly	3	1	4
Rarely	8	—	8
Calls Only	3	—	3
No Contact	2	3	5
Total	16	4	20

Father contact was measured by asking the question: how often do you see your father? The responses daughters reported indicated the following. Those daughters who reported either seeing their father once

every two weeks or talking to him every week and seeing him once a month were grouped in the "regularly" category. Other daughters explicitly said they saw their father only on holidays or on special occasions, hence a few times a year. They were grouped in the "rarely" category. Those daughters who reported not seeing their father at all were grouped in the "no contact" category.

Father remarriage was measured by asking the question: Is your father remarried? Again, since daughters of divorce did not regard common-law unions as marriages, those fathers who came from such an arrangement were placed in the "unremarried" category. Therefore, Table #8 reflects daughters' perceptions of reality which is not congruent with the legal reality; according to Quebec law, men involved in common-law unions are legally married. Also, there is no indication that these fathers did not perceive themselves as married. Table #8 indicates that of those 13 daughters who either rarely see their father, receive only calls or have no contact with him, all have a father who is remarried. The exceptions in the table are the following. One sees her father regularly (he is not remarried due to his homosexuality). Those daughters whose fathers did not remarry and who have no contact were both physically abused by their father, and therefore did not wish to maintain contact. One never saw or heard from her father since the divorce.

All in all, many daughters were fearful about their father's remarriage. Other than the fact that fathers more often than not enter remarriages where children are present, perhaps this fear can also be

explained by the fact that a remarriage entails another transition and restructuring of the familial unit:

"When your parents divorce, you're afraid of being abandoned, afraid they'll stop loving you and afraid they'll replace you somehow. When they remarry, it's like you go through all these fears and all the pain they involved all over again (Jenna)."

"It's like a wound which somehow heals and then gets reopened and never really heals properly nor completely again (Paulina)". Remarriage can therefore be interpreted by daughters as another rupture like divorce, and experience the fear of losing their father all over again.

#### Relations between parents and children

The most significant revelation with reference to the relationships daughters of divorce report having with parents is this: those women who had close relationships with either their mothers or fathers before their parents' marital dissolution report having a close relationship with them today, no matter what circumstances existed during or following the break-up. For example, Jenna, who was never close to her father, said:

"Not much has changed with my father: he was too busy when I was little, remained busy when I grew up and is as busy as he ever was to this day. He was always too busy to care. We see each other a few times a year. Our relationship could be called a relationship of courtesy. Sometimes I wonder if he sees me out of obligation or of a sense of guilt".

When Jenna thinks of her father, feelings of inferiority, rejection, anger, and most of all pain come to mind. She reports these feelings have been there ever since she can remember. Consequently, Jenna believes that even if her father was too suddenly change and display some kind of affection to her, it wouldn't take back the twenty and some odd years of grief he put her through. She adds: "I could never

forgive him. I could never trust him...therefore, we could never be friends."

Of the eight daughters who reported having close relationships with their father, all report being close to him today. Nastasia and Olivia both described their relationship with their fathers as follows: "We were always close. Today, we are closer than ever. We call each other every week (Nastasia)." "He and I were close when I was little, and today, we're good friends. We call and see each other regularly (Olivia)." They both enjoyed close relationships with their father before the divorce, and their fathers have maintained regular contact throughout.

Moreover, those twelve relationships that daughters reported as being distant or non-existent remained that way: "I was never close to my father and I never will be. I haven't seen or heard of him and prefer it that way. My mother and I have a life now and have a real family (Lina)." Many daughters reported their fathers dropped out of the picture entirely after their parents' divorce: "I never saw my father after the divorce, and I haven't heard from him since (Michelle)." Others mentioned the only link they had with their father was a financial one, namely alimony: "What I really cared about was that he delivered the goods on time (Dina)."

Many revealed their father was hardly available due to his remarriage and newly formed family, his demanding job, or his distant area of residence. "If he hadn't remarried, I know he would have spent more time with me (Jenna)." " "My father lived only for his job; we

hardly mattered (Marie)." "I hardly saw my father, because he moved to another province (Anna).

In contrast, as is reflected in the literature on children of divorce, not as many changes were observed amongst the daughters and their relationship with their mother. In general, children experience a closer relationship with their mother and report a more positive one than they do in regard to their father (Peterson and Zill, 1986,298). Although varying in degree, and with the exception of two subjects who reported being closer to their fathers and having a somewhat close relationship to their mother, eighteen daughters reported they had a closer relationship with their mother before, during and following their parents' divorce, and still do today. "My mother and I are best friends (Celine)." "If it wasn't for my mother, I wouldn't be who I am today (Michelle)." "My mother is the most affectionate person I have ever known, and if it wasn't for her affection, I would not have know love until a very late age (Virginia)."

#### Summary

In short, the majority of daughters state they had to cope with various factors emanating from their parents' divorce: father absence, ongoing parental conflict, rejection, remarriages and all they entail, an unhappy and husbandless mother, divided loyalties, complications with visitations and so forth. Amongst the coping mechanisms used, the most useful, according to daughters, were support systems, an available father, and professional help. Only a few daughters stated they did not need to cope; usually, they came from abusive backgrounds. The exception in this sample had both parents work cooperatively after divorce.



Moreover, the majority of daughters reported that remarriages do in fact (at least for some time) make matters more difficult. Many fears having to do with father's remarriage are reawakened. Daughters report significantly fewer problems with their mother's remarriage. In fact, when mothers remarry, daughters tend to react more favourably toward their father's remarriage. The majority of daughters today report that they are comfortable and contented with their parents' present marital status. Although some are still experiencing difficulties, most are not, and they reveal that their perceptions and feelings have indeed changed (to more positive ones) through time. Virginia adds: "Life has a funny way of turning things around".

Lastly, very few daughters enjoy a close relationship with their father. For some, this proves to be painful, while for others, it's just the way they like it. Yet, some will never quite digest their father dropping out of the picture and deciding for them that there would be no relationship. However, many reported enjoying a close relationship with their mother and their step-father. As is reflected in this research, and in some of the literature on children of divorce, it's important to keep in mind that not all children of divorce are in trouble or experiencing difficulties. Many have found a new balanced structure for their life. Such is the case with Lina, Mikasa, Victoria and Veronica. Many have accepted the division of their time and love between parents who live apart (like Stacey, Anna, Nastasia, Jeanne and Olivia), or they have a step-parent or other satisfactory substitute for the missing parent (for example, Aifa, Celine, Michelle, Dina and Marie). But for some children, divorce will remain a difficult experience (such is the case for Virginia, Jenna, Roxanne and Paulina).

### Conclusion

The reactions of daughters to their parents' divorce varied depending on a wide range of variables. In particular, three variables stood out as having negatively affected virtually all daughters: the relationship between their parents (i.e. the level of conflict), the emotional health of the mother, and father absence and/or unavailability.

The degree to which daughters reported having been negatively affected by their parents' divorce depends largely on the level of conflict which existed between the parents. Daughters who reported high levels of maladjustment after divorce and who still report experiencing difficulties today came from high conflict homes. Another factor which the majority of daughters reported as one of the most painful outcomes of their parents' divorce was seeing and dealing with their mothers' emotional distress, which for some lasted for extended periods of time after divorce. Mothers' violent mood swings, depression, unhappiness, and/or aggressive behaviour were reported as being particularly difficult to deal with on top of having to deal with their own feelings regarding parental divorce.

An overwhelming majority reported having been negatively affected by their fathers' absence and/or unavailability. Chapter 4 reveals that even prior to their parents' divorce, the majority of daughters reported their father was absent. Chapter 5 indicated that the majority of fathers virtually dropped out of their daughters' lives after the divorce had been granted; this is especially true if the mother or the

father remarries. Chapter 5 also indicates that only a tiny minority get to see their fathers regularly, while the majority see him infrequently or not at all.

Moreover, the majority of daughters reported remarriages were problematic. Several daughters experience problems of divided loyalties, many reported resorting to lying for their mothers' sakes and theirs. Inevitably, these situations become even more difficult when parental conflicts continued. Those daughters whose fathers remarried twice (third marriage) expressed the most difficulties. Daughters expressed major problems with their fathers' remarriages, particularly if their mother was not remarried. Fears of being abandoned by their father or replaced by their father's wife or step-children were common. Sadly, they usually end up reflecting reality.

Furthermore, the relationships daughters reported having with their parents vary greatly from one to the other. While the majority of daughters report enjoying close relationships with their mothers, only a very few report the same with their fathers. All daughters who were close to their fathers prior to divorce, ended up being close to them again. But those who were not close to their fathers prior to divorce, remained so, whether they had professional help or not. Of the few who share a close relationship with their fathers, all report having available fathers who let them know how much they care.

Finally, while some daughters reported they were still presently coping with various factors emanating from their parents' divorce, a few advanced that they had nothing to resolve nor cope with, for the divorce had resolved all problems for them. Of the ten daughters who sought

professional help, only four report seeking it as a result of their parents' divorce. All came from high conflict families and did not have any support system. Of those who did not seek professional help, the majority reported that having support systems was critical to their adjustment and well-being.

In short, several salient themes have emerged: the significant impact of the level of conflict between parents, the profound effect of the mother's emotional health, the absence of men in their father role, the complexities of parental remarriages, the usefulness of support systems, and the importance of the relationship with parents before, during and after the divorce.

Divorce is not necessarily a disaster. It can be an unhappy, difficult and painful experience, and it may even be a solution. In itself, divorce need not be either a bad thing or a good thing for the children. It all depends in the circumstances; and on what human beings involved make of it. All change is difficult, and divorce, whatever else it may be, is change. Divorce can be a cleansing and healing experience for the child and the parent. It is not automatically destructive. Parents' support can help the child through its difficulties, by relieving him/her of guilt and fear, and/or assuring the child that his/her parents' love is no less than it previously was.

Coparenting after divorce rarely occurs (Furstenberg, 1990; Berman, 1990). Many children of divorce find themselves entangled in their parents' hatred and resentment, often for years and years after the divorce has been granted.

But the most striking finding in this research is the absence of the father, not only after divorce, but before it also. Findings to date suggest that "we are presently witnessing a huge rejection by men of their father role" (Eichler, 1988,272). From what daughters reported in this research, men's rejection of their father role is not a new phenomenon. The majority of daughters reported their father was absent even before their parents divorced (and this was twenty years ago). In most cases, it is probable that children and fathers would profit from mutual interaction, but this should be manifested within the context of marriage, and not only demanded as a right after its breakdown.

Under all circumstances, it seems that divorce is a very difficult process for all the women, men and children involved. The after-effects are different for parents and daughters. But in spite of the extreme stress experienced, divorce seems to be preferable to the frequent alternative, namely, continuing a conflict-ridden marriage. Effort should thus be concentrated on minimizing the negative effects of divorce. This includes four aspects in particular: decreasing the negative economic effects, creating and fostering social support networks for the recently divorced and the children involved, decreasing the level of conflict ex-spouses all too often harbour for years after their divorce, encouraging biological fathers to maintain contact not just for the "good" of their children, but because they too will in turn benefit from mutual interaction. These aspects would reduce the negative impact of divorce and help daughters in their post-divorce adjustment. Let me leave the final word to one of the daughters of divorce, Virginia:

"When I was little, my parents were the king and queen of the magic kingdom. I was the little princess wandering in the castle. I thought I had a fairy-tale family. When my parents divorced, it was an abrupt and painful ending to a story I had believed in with all my heart. It was the difficult realization that it had been but a tale, and that my parents were not the flawless, godlike creatures I once thought they were. Today, I see them just as they are, with their faults and their qualities, capable of love and hurt...The divorce of my parents will be with me always, but it's something I have finally learned to live with."

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## **APPENDIX**

## QUESTIONS

### 1) Situation in the Home

What was the situation in the home before and during the divorce with regard to the following:

- a) Financial strain
- b) Violence and/or conflict during the marriage
- c) Your awareness of parental anger, conflicts, violence, financial difficulties, or problems
- d) Cooperation and relations between the spouses
- e) Custodian's attachment and/or feelings to ex-spouse
- f) Parents' emotional state

### 2) Relationship with Parents

What was the relationship with your father with regard to the following:

- a) Relationship before the divorce
- b) Relationship during and after the divorce
- c) Relationship during visits and frequency (if any)
- d) Your Father berating your Mother
- e) Availability
- f) Money (alimony)

What was the relationship with your Mother with regard to the following:

- a) Relationship before the divorce
- b) Relationship during and after the divorce
- c) Your Mother berating your Father
- d) Availability
- e) Finances
- f) Responsibilities and (house) chores

### 3) Changes, Reactions and Transitions

Discuss and expand on the following:

- a) What were some of the changes you were faced with during your parents' divorce? Which were the most problematic?
- b) Did you feel your parents' divorce was a difficult event? What about their divorce did you find most difficult and why? Did you have difficulty dealing with the divorce?
- c) Did you feel responsible?
- d) Were you affected by your father's absence (why and how)? (e.g. emotional, financial, physical, and/or social absence...)?

#### 4) Coping Mechanisms

- a) How did you cope with your parents' divorce and your father's absence? Did you, for example, seek some form of help, such as therapy, counselling, priest, friends, drugs; or were you surrounded by a support system who helped you through difficult times?
- b) What form of help did you find most useful, why?
- c) If you necessitated help, how long was it until you felt better and/or didn't feel you required it anymore?

#### 5) Remarriages

- a) Are your parents remarried, if so who is?
- b) Do you feel or ever felt that was problematic (why)?
- c) How do you feel about your parents' marital status today?  
And if you feel differently towards their remarriage (today) explain why or what made you change your mind.
- d) Discuss the relationship with your parents today:  
closeness, level of intimacy, availability, # of visits...etc.