

THE DIVIDED WORLD OF THE CHILD: DIVORCE AND LONG-TERM PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT*

Gordon E. Finley and Seth J. Schwartz

This study evaluated the extent to which divorce creates the “divided world of the child,” as well as consequences of this “divided world” for long-term adjustment. An ethnically diverse sample of 1,375 young-adult university students completed retrospective measures of parental nurturance and involvement, and current measures of psychosocial adjustment and troubled ruminations about parents. Results indicated that reports of maternal and paternal nurturance and involvement were closely related in intact families but uncorrelated in divorced families. Across family forms, the total amount of nurturance or involvement received was positively associated with self-esteem, purpose in life, life satisfaction, friendship quality and satisfaction, and academic performance; and negatively related to distress, romantic relationship problems, and troubled ruminations about parents. Mother-father differences in nurturance and involvement showed a largely opposite set of relationships. Implications for family court practices are discussed.

Keywords: *Divorce; adjustment; fathers; mothers; involvement; nurturance*

It is well-established that divorce creates multiple adjustment issues for parents and children (Kelly, 2007). Following divorce, one parent – usually the father – generally becomes nonresident (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). When the father leaves the child’s home, the child becomes part of two households instead of one. Becoming nonresident often decreases a father’s involvement in his child’s life (Amato, 1998; Carlson, 2006), which leads to increased child distress (Schwartz & Finley, 2010) and perhaps to increased risk taking (Schwartz et al., 2009). Whereas the intact family represents a system where both parents regulate the children’s lives, in the divorced family the mother and father occupy “separate worlds,” and the child must reconcile these separate worlds (Marquardt, 2005). We refer to this situation as “the divided world of the child” (Finley, 2006).

The “divided world of the child” model inherently draws on family systems theory. Family systems theory posits that the larger family system holds family members together and causes their behaviors to be interrelated (Ng & Smith, 2006; White, 1999). In divorced families, the nonresident parent may no longer be an active member of the family system in which the child resides. In essence, divorce divides the former family system and creates multiple family systems, often with the child as the only common link between them (cf. Emery & Dillon, 1994).

Supporting the “divided world” thesis, reports of maternal and paternal involvement are reasonably correlated with one another in intact families (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; White, 1999), but less so in divorced families (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996; King & Sobolewski, 2006). The lack of correlation between maternal and paternal involvement suggests that “Mom’s World” and “Dad’s World” are separate and disconnected. Marquardt (2005), using qualitative interviews, found that many children of divorce portrayed “Mom’s World” and “Dad’s World” as divided and found this division distressing.

Although some intact families may also create a “divided world” (e.g., through parental psychopathology, work schedules, and competing interests and demands), the structural and legal parameters involved in the divorce process and its sequelae (e.g., nonresident parenting, visitation schedules) may be most likely to create the “divided world” effect by reducing one parent’s nurturance and involvement in the child’s life.

Correspondence: finley@fiu.edu; SSchwartz@med.miami.edu

The present study was guided by two objectives. First, we examined the relationship between emerging adults' retrospective reports of their mothers' and fathers' nurturance and involvement. Family systems theory would predict that mothers' and fathers' nurturance/involvement would be positively interrelated in intact families because the larger system increases the relationship between maternal and paternal behaviors (cf. White, 1999). In divorced families, however, where parents are no longer housed within the same family system, perceptions of corresponding maternal and paternal parenting variables should be unrelated to one another (Buchanan et al., 1996; King & Sobolewski, 2006). The "divided world" effect in divorced families may therefore emerge as a result of removing the overarching family system that houses the child and both parents.

Second, not all divorces are equal in the extent to which they create a "divided world" (Harvey & Fine, 2004). Some divorced parents remain cordial with one another and create a relatively coherent environment for their children, whereas others are indifferent – or even hostile – toward one another. As a result, individual difference factors contribute to the "divided world" effect in both intact and divorced families. When examining effects across parents, it is important to examine both the *total* amount of involvement received from both parents, as well as the *difference* between the level of involvement received from one's mother and father (cf. Beyers & Goossens, 2008). The "divided world" effect is therefore important to operationalize in two related ways. First, the difference in the extent of nurturance and involvement between parents corresponds closely to how Marquardt (2005) and others have characterized the "divided world" effect. Second, it is important to characterize precisely *where* this difference lies on the continuum of nurturance or involvement. A highly involved mother and a moderately involved father may be characterized by the same discrepancy as a moderately involved mother and an uninvolved father. However, these two scenarios are completely different in terms of the involvement that the child receives, and likely in terms of the consequences for the child's long-term functioning. Although mothers tend to be more involved than fathers in most family activities, including childrearing (Craig, 2006; Dienhart, 2002), this difference – and thus the "divided world" effect – may be exacerbated in nonresident-father divorced families (Schwartz & Finley, 2009), presumably due to the structural factors related to post-divorce custody and visitation arrangements. The father's decreased involvement may also signify reductions in the *total* amount of nurturance and involvement that the child receives.

Finally, another aspect of the divided world hypothesis concerns the regulation of conflict (e.g., Marquardt, 2005). In divorced families, and also in intact families where the parents are disconnected from one another, much of the conflict that has occurred between the parents becomes *internalized* within the child. This internalized conflict takes a number of forms, one of which we label *troubled ruminations about parents* (Schwartz & Finley, 2010). That is, young people from divorced families may feel, to a greater extent than those from intact families, that one or both of their parents caused pain in their families, that the nonresident parent was not interested in spending time with them, that their parents may not have loved them, and that they are dissatisfied with their relationships with one or both parents (Fabricius, 2003; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). In divorced families, there now are multiple family systems where there once was one. Thus, these systems may separate from one another as each parent forms a new family system separate from that of the other parent (cf. Arditto & Madden-Derdich, 1997). Critically, these multiple family systems remain connected predominantly through the child, thereby placing the burden on the child for interfacing between these divergent family systems. This may, in part, lead to troubled ruminations about one or both parents. A similar effect may occur in intact families where the "divided world" effect exists. In either case, troubled ruminations about parents are indicative of distress (cf. Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000).

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: USE OF RETROSPECTIVE REPORTS OF PARENTING

Our methodological framework is a blend of child-centered and multidimensional perspectives on parental nurturance and involvement. The primary premise of our research program is based on Rohner's (1986) theory that children's perceptions of their parents are uniquely predictive of later outcomes (see Khaleque & Rohner, 2002; Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer,

2005, for reviews). Our focus on multiple components of parental involvement is drawn from Hawkins and Palkovitz's (1999) call for multidimensional understandings and measures of parent involvement (see Finley & Schwartz, 2004).

Our use of retrospective reports of parenting with emerging adult samples is consistent with a number of prior studies (e.g., Fabricius, 2003; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). The retrospective method also is consistent with a view of emerging adulthood as a time of reflection and of looking back on one's childhood and adolescence – including relationships with parents – in its entirety (Arnett, 2000; Warshak, 2003). Given that they are of legal age and may have more freedom than minors to express their true feelings and opinions, emerging adults may be in a unique position to characterize the totality of their relationships with their parents (Finley & Schwartz, 2007). This may be especially true in divorced families, where minors may still be involved in the family court system and may be less willing (or able) to speak their minds (Warshak, 2003).

HYPOTHESES

In evaluating the “divided world” hypothesis, we tested two predictions. First, consistent with family systems theory (White, 1999), we expected all of the corresponding mothering and fathering variables to correlate highly among intact families and negligibly or zero in divorced families. Second, we expected that high total amounts of perceived nurturance and involvement would be related to positive psychosocial outcomes. However, we also expected that the *extent* to which the child perceives her or his world as divided would be related to negative psychosocial outcomes as well as to troubled ruminations, especially about the father. We further expected that the extent to which the person's world was perceived as divided would be greater in divorced families than in intact families.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Data for the present study were taken from a recently collected dataset focusing on maternal and paternal nurturance and involvement (Finley, Mira, & Schwartz, 2008). Participants were 1,375 emerging-adult university students (75% female; mean age 19.85, *SD* 3.46) from intact and divorced families who identified both of their biological parents as their most important parent figures. Participants from divorced families were included as long as they did not report residing with their fathers at any time following their parents' divorce. We did this because mothers are awarded primary physical custody in the vast majority of divorces and because father-resident divorced families may be substantively different from other types of divorced families (Greif, 1995; Schwartz & Finley, 2005).

The present sample represents 80.2% of the total sample collected. Half of all participants (50%) were first-year students, with the remainder being sophomores (19%), juniors (17%), seniors (12%), or graduate students (2%). In terms of ethnicity, 58% of participants were Hispanic, 24% were non-Hispanic White, 13% were non-Hispanic Black, 5% were Asian, and 1% were Other. Most (81%) of the data were gathered at a public university in Miami, where the majority of students are Hispanic, and the remainder were gathered at another public university in northern Florida that serves a largely non-Hispanic White student population. The majority (74%) of participants were born in the United States, whereas the majority of mothers (67%) and fathers (69%) were born abroad. The most common countries of origin for immigrant participants and parents were Cuba, Colombia, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Jamaica.

Of the 1,375 participants included in the present analyses, 75% ($n = 1,037$) were from intact families, and 25% ($n = 338$) were from divorced families. The mean participant age at the time of divorce was 8.2 years (*SD* 5.2, range 0 to 22). Participants from the full dataset, but not included in these analyses, included those reporting the death of one or both parents (2.2%; $n = 39$), those rating

a non-biological mother or father figure (9.5%; $n = 162$), those reporting that their parents had never been married (0.5%; $n = 8$), participants from divorced families who resided with their fathers at any time following divorce (4.0%; $n = 69$), and those who did not provide family form data (3.5%; $n = 60$).

MEASURES

Nurturant Mothering and Fathering. Adult children's retrospective reports of parental nurturance were measured using the Nurturant Mothering and Fathering Scales (Finley et al., 2008; Finley & Schwartz, 2004). Each item is responded to on a five-point scale, with the scale endpoints varying as a function of item content. Sample items include "When you needed your father's (mother's) support, was he (she) there for you?" Cronbach's alpha coefficients for scores on the nurturant mothering and fathering scales were .90 and .93, respectively. The factor structure of these items was equivalent across mothers and fathers (Finley et al., 2008).

Maternal and Paternal Involvement. Mother and father involvement were each assessed in 20 domains of parenting drawn primarily from Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999). Within each domain, we asked participants to indicate on a scale of 1 (*not at all involved*) to 5 (*extremely involved*) how involved their mothers and fathers had been during the participant's childhood and adolescence.

Using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, Finley and Schwartz (2004) extracted three fathering subscales from the 20 involvement domains: instrumental (discipline, being protective, career development, providing income, ethical/moral development, school/homework, developing independence, and developing responsibility), expressive (caregiving, companionship, leisure/fun/play, sharing activities/interests, emotional development, social development, spiritual development, and physical development), and mentoring/advising (mentoring/teaching, advising, developing competence, and intellectual development). In the present sample, Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .79 to .91, with a mean of .86.

Troubled Ruminations about Parents. To assess troubled ruminations about mother and father, we used two four-item Troubled Ruminations about Parents Scales (Schwartz & Finley, 2010). These scales consist of three items adapted from the Painful Feelings about Divorce measure (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). We selected items that (a) were applicable to participants from both intact and divorced families and (b) reflected an angry, ruminative, painful, or regretful tone regarding past relationships with parents. These items were "My father/mother caused most of the pain in my family," "I wish my father/mother had spent more time with me when I was younger," and "There have been times when I wondered if my father/mother even loved me." We also added two items assessing overall satisfaction with one's mother and with one's father. In the present sample, Cronbach's alpha estimates for troubled ruminations about mother and about father were .78 and .81, respectively.

Psychosocial Functioning. We assessed eight indices of psychosocial functioning using commonly used measures of each construct. From each measure, we selected a subset of items (generally between two and five). We did this as a way of assessing an extensive range of psychosocial outcomes without the instrumentation becoming too long. Our primary motivation for using shortened scales was a concern regarding the amount of time during which students were likely to maintain concentration and to provide accurate responses.

For each scale, the authors and a panel of undergraduate and graduate students selected those items that appeared to most directly reflect the construct of interest and that were most appropriate for emerging adults. Each student then administered the selected items to 5–10 pilot participants and asked them to identify the clearest and most face-valid items for each construct. The authors and students then met again and selected the items that they and the pilot participants believed best represented the dimensions of psychosocial functioning that we intended to measure. Data from these pilot participants were not included in the present analyses.

Self-esteem was measured using two items from the Coopersmith (1981) Self-Esteem Scale, along with items assessing overall self-esteem and overall satisfaction with one's physical appearance (cf. Harter, 1999). The response scale ranged from 1 (*Completely False*) to 4 (*Completely True*). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .78.

Purpose in life was measured using two items ("In life, I have very clear goals and aims for myself" and "I have discovered clear-cut goals and a satisfying life purpose") taken from the Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969). The response scale ranged from 1 (*Completely False*) to 4 (*Completely True*). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .82.

Life satisfaction was measured using a single item that asked participants to indicate their overall satisfaction with life, on a scale of 1 (*Very Low*) to 5 (*Very High*). Single-item measures of life satisfaction have been commonly used and appear to possess adequate construct validity (e.g., Antonucci, Lansford, & Akiyama, 2001; Makinen & Pynchyl, 2001).

Psychological distress was measured using four items from the Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck, Epstein, Brown, & Steer, 1988), four items from the Centers for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977), and three reverse-coded items from the Ego Strength Scale (Epstein, 1983). All of these items were responded to using a scale ranging from 1 (*Completely False*) to 4 (*Completely True*). The Cronbach's alpha estimate was .87.

Friendship quality was measured using three items from the Friendship Quality Scale (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994). Although this measure was designed for use with adolescents, we selected those items that would also apply to emerging adults. These items were "If my closest friend and I have a fight or argument, we can apologize and everything will be OK," "I can be completely open with my closest friend," and "I can always count on my closest friend." These items were responded to using a scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Agree*). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .71.

Satisfaction with friendships was measured using a single item assessing overall satisfaction with friendships, on a scale of 1 (*Very Low*) to 5 (*Very High*). This item was left separate from friendship quality because it did not correlate with the friendship quality items.

Romantic relationship problems were measured using three items from the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988), assessing the extent to which (a) romantic partners meet the person's needs, (b) the person has problems in her/his relationships, and (c) s/he regrets having gotten into most of these relationships. We added two additional items referring to being taken advantage of in relationships and to one's relationships not lasting very long. We adapted these items to refer to romantic relationships in general, because some participants may not have been in a committed relationship at the time of data collection. The response scale ranged from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Disagree*). The Cronbach's alpha estimate was .72.

Academic performance was assessed using items measuring (a) overall satisfaction with one's academic work, (b) one's characterization of oneself in high school and in college (e.g., A student, B student), and (c) self-reported high school grade point average. Satisfaction with academic work was rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*Very Low*) to 5 (*Very High*). The Cronbach's alpha estimate was .69.

PROCEDURE

In Miami, participants came to a laboratory and completed the assessment in groups of 8–10. In Northern Florida, participants completed the assessment in class. Average completion time ranged from 20–30 minutes. Data were collected between September 2004 and January 2006.

RESULTS

Membership in the intact versus divorced family forms did not differ significantly by emerging-adult gender, $\chi^2(2, N = 1443) = 3.10, p = .21, \phi = .05$. However, there were significant ethnic

differences by family form, $\chi^2(6, N = 1424) = 39.71, p < .001, \phi = .17$. Ninety-six percent of Asian participants, compared to 71% of non-Hispanic Whites, 59% of non-Hispanic Blacks, and 73% of Hispanics, were from intact families.

Hypothesis 1: Relationships between Perceived Maternal and Paternal Nurturance and Involvement by Family Form

We tested Hypothesis 1 by correlating reports of nurturance, expressive involvement, instrumental involvement, and mentoring/advising across parents. We also evaluated the extent to which, within each family form, each correlation was consistent across gender and across ethnicity.

We tested for correlation differences using a procedure outlined by Cheung and Chan (2004). All of the correlations to be compared are estimated within a single model, to avoid problems associated with testing the same hypothesis multiple times. The correlation differences were tested in two steps. First, we tested for differences in correlations *between* family forms. A model with these correlations free to vary across family form was compared to a model with these correlations held equal across family form. The difference in correlations across family form can be indexed as the difference in model fit between the constrained and unconstrained models – where model fit is indexed according to how well each of the models matches the data. A significant difference in model fit is represented by at least two of the following three criteria: a significant chi-square difference (Byrne, 2001), a difference in comparative fit indices (CFI) of .01 or greater (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), and a difference in non-normed fit indices (NNFI) of .02 or greater (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). If these fit indices change appreciably when the correlations are held equal across family forms, then we can assume that the correlations are significantly unequal across family forms. This approach is more statistically powerful than the traditional (r-to-z) method of comparing correlation coefficients – which is known to be rather weak (Cheung & Chan, 2004).

Analyses indicated significant correlation differences across family forms, $\Delta\chi^2(10) = 50.75, p < .001; \Delta CFI = .003; \Delta NNFI = .052$. The correlations between corresponding maternal and paternal variables were strong and significant for intact families and close to zero for nonresident-father divorced families (see Table 1).

Second, we sought to examine whether these correlation differences may have been due to emerging-adult gender or ethnicity. Within each family form, we tested for correlation differences across gender and across ethnicity using the same procedure used to test for differences across family form. Correlations were consistent across gender within both family forms: intact families, $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 5.43, p = .37; \Delta CFI < .001; \Delta NNFI = .001$; and divorced families, $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 5.55, p = .35; \Delta CFI < .001; \Delta NNFI = .004$. Correlations were also consistent across ethnicity within intact families, $\Delta\chi^2(10) = 15.98, p = .10; \Delta CFI = .001; \Delta NNFI = .002$, and within divorced families, $\Delta\chi^2(10) = 11.76, p = .30; \Delta CFI = .001; \Delta NNFI = .009$. These findings therefore suggest that the correlation differences across family form were not due to gender or to ethnicity – and that these differences were likely due to family form itself.

Table 1
Mother-Father Correlations by Family Form

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Intact</i>	<i>Divorced</i>
Nurturance	.37***	.06
Expressive Involvement	.50***	.04
Instrumental Involvement	.45***	.03
Mentoring/Advising	.38***	-.01

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Hypothesis 2: Consequences of the Divided World for Psychosocial Functioning

In the final set of analyses, we operationalized the “divided world” effect as a continuum and examined its relationship to emerging adult psychosocial functioning. Following Beyers and Goossens (2008), we computed latent “total” and “difference” scores between reports of corresponding maternal and paternal processes. This allows both the “total” amount of nurturance and involvement received from parents, as well as the difference in perceived mothering versus fathering, to predict each psychosocial outcome. The “total” latent variable was created by fixing the path coefficient to each parenting variable to 1, and the path from the “difference” latent variable to the father variable was fixed to -1 . These constraints specify that both parents’ nurturance or involvement scores are added together to derive the “total” score, and that the father’s amount of nurturance or involvement score is subtracted from the mother’s score to derive the “difference” score.

A separate model was estimated for each parenting variable (nurturance, expressive involvement, instrumental involvement, and mentoring/advising). We also modeled family form as a predictor of the “total” and “difference” scores for each parenting variable, to ascertain the extent to which the “divided world” effect might differ by family. The unstandardized regression coefficients for these paths represent the magnitude of the difference, in standard deviations, between intact and divorced families.

We evaluated the fit of each model using the CFI, which compares the fit of the model being evaluated to that of a null model with no relationships between variables, as well as the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which reflects the extent to which the correlations implied by the model deviate from those observed in the data. The chi-square index (χ^2) tests the null hypothesis of perfect fit to the data – which is often impossible to achieve – and as a result, the χ^2 is reported but is not used to evaluate model fit. As specified by Keith (2006) and Kline (2006), good model fit is represented by a CFI of .95 or higher and a RMSEA of .05 or below, with .90 and .08 representing the lower and upper bounds for acceptable CFI and RMSEA values, respectively.

These path models fit the data well, χ^2 (10 df each) ranged from 62.83 to 102.57, all $ps < .001$, CFI ranged from .98 to .99, RMSEA ranged from .062 to .082. Divorced families were rated lower than intact families on total scores for three of the four parenting variables: nurturance, $B = -.11$, $p < .02$; expressive involvement, $B = -.13$, $p < .001$; and total mentoring/advising involvement, $B = -.14$, $p < .001$. In terms of the mother-father difference scores, divorced families scored significantly higher than intact families on all four parenting variables: nurturance, $B = .67$, $p < .001$; expressive involvement, $B = .65$, $p < .001$; instrumental involvement, $B = .94$, $p < .001$; and mentoring/advising involvement, $B = .46$, $p < .001$.

For nurturance and all three dimensions of involvement, the total score was significantly related to all of the psychosocial functioning indices and to troubled ruminations about parents. The difference score was significantly related (in the opposite direction) to all of these indices except for purpose in life and academics (see Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The present study yields two important insights into the “divided world of the child.” First, and consistent with prior work (Marsiglio et al., 2000; White, 1999) with intact families, reports of nurturance and involvement from mothers and from fathers were closely related. However, this was not the case in divorced families. Second, when the “divided world” was operationalized as a continuum, the total amount of nurturance and involvement across parents was positively linked with indices of well-being, and negatively linked with indices of distress, romantic relationship problems, and troubled ruminations about parents. Between-parent differences in nurturance and involvement were negatively related to self-esteem, life satisfaction, and friendship quality and satisfaction; and positively related to distress, romantic relationship problems, and troubled ruminations about parents. Further, divorced families were associated with a greater “divided world” effect than intact families,

Table 2

Standard Regression Coefficients for Psychosocial Indices on Parenting Variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Nurturance</i>		<i>Expressive Involvement</i>		<i>Instrumental Involvement</i>		<i>Mentoring/ Advising</i>	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Self-Esteem	.33***	-.16***	.31***	-.14***	.23***	-.12***	.29***	-.16***
Purpose in Life	.22***	-.01	.23***	-.02	.25***	.01	.25***	-.01
Life Satisfaction	.45***	-.22***	.42***	-.19***	.34***	-.15***	.40***	-.17***
Friendship Quality	.16***	-.10**	.16***	-.09**	.16***	-.07*	.18***	-.09**
Friendship Satisfaction	.23***	-.17***	.21***	-.18***	.19***	-.13***	.21***	-.12***
Romantic Problems	-.24***	.14***	-.23***	.13***	-.19***	.09**	-.20***	.09**
Psychological Distress	-.31***	.17***	-.27***	.15***	-.23***	.13***	-.27***	.14***
Academics	.17***	-.06*	.19***	-.07*	.18***	-.07*	.20***	-.06*
Troubled Ruminations Mother	-.74***	-.04	-.60***	-.04	-.48***	.08**	-.55***	.06*
Troubled Ruminations Father	-.70***	.70***	-.59***	.62***	-.50***	.56***	-.58***	.59***

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

suggesting that divorce is associated with compromised quality of life in emerging adulthood, as well as with troubled ruminations about one's father. All of these findings were consistent across gender and ethnicity – suggesting that custody and access decisions need to be responsive to the feelings and outcomes of children of divorce, regardless of their gender or ethnic background.

EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON THE “DIVIDED WORLD” EFFECT

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, in divorced families there was virtually no relationship between reports of corresponding maternal and paternal processes – suggesting that the adult child's world had been sharply divided. Divorce therefore appears to be associated with a perception that one's parents are sharply different in their levels of nurturance and involvement – which can be troubling for the child, as noted below. This pattern represents the essence of the divided world of the child, as originally conceptualized by Marquardt (2005). “Dad's World” becomes separated from the child's primary family system. It must be noted, however, that the degree to which this occurs likely varies from one divorced family to another (Harvey & Fine, 2004). The extent of the “divided world” may depend on the extent of cordiality between the parents, the child's custody arrangement (Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, & Dornbusch, 1993), and whether one parent has relocated away from the other (Braver, Ellman, & Fabricius, 2003).

Moreover, the “divided world” effect is associated not only with more traditional measures of well-being, distress, and relational functioning, but also with troubled ruminations about the father. Troubled ruminations include dissatisfaction with the father-child relationship, feeling unloved by the father, feeling that he caused most of the pain in the family, and doubting whether he wanted to spend time with the person. At least some of this is likely a result of structural factors resulting from custody and access decisions.

EFFECTS OF DIFFERENTIAL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND NURTURANCE ON EMERGING ADULT CHILDREN'S PSYCHOSOCIAL FUNCTIONING

The results for Hypothesis 2 were also supportive of the “divided world of the child” thesis – and suggest that the “divided world” effect is more pronounced in divorced families than in intact families. As anticipated, the total amount of involvement received from both parents was predictive of all of the

psychosocial functioning indices across family forms, and the difference between maternal and paternal nurturance and involvement was a significant predictor in the vast majority (85%) of cases. What this suggests is that perceiving both parents as non-nurturant and uninvolved and/or perceiving a sharp difference between maternal and paternal nurturance or involvement may be associated with compromised psychosocial functioning and troubled ruminations in emerging adults. These conditions may be most likely to emerge in young adult children from nonresident-father divorced families (Schwartz & Finley, 2009, 2010).

Critically, although it is possible for a “divided world” to emerge in intact families, there are structural effects of divorce, and of custody and access decisions, that may make the divided world effect more likely to appear in divorced families. In intact families, the divided world effect is most likely to emerge when parents are differentially involved. One common example would be when one parent is largely non-nurturant and uninvolved while the other is highly nurturant and highly involved. However, in divorced families where the father generally is cast into a nonresident role, divorce itself may structurally create the divided world effect. It is therefore essential for family courts to create post-divorce custody arrangements that maximize nurturance and involvement from both parents in order to reduce the “divided world” effect.

Among the psychosocial functioning indices, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and psychological distress appear to be among those most affected both by “total” parenting and by mother-father differences in parenting. These three psychosocial functioning indices, taken together, have been labeled as “subjective well-being” (Sheldon et al., 2004) and are often used to index quality of life in young people. Post-divorce arrangements that marginalize the father from the child’s life and decrease that parent’s nurturance and involvement (cf. Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Finley & Schwartz, 2006; 2007) thus appear to have far-reaching impacts on young people’s quality of life. In turn, these effects may be associated with subsequent difficulties in career and in relationships (Côté, 2002). Troubled ruminations about the father, which also appear to result from lowered parental nurturance and involvement and from the “divided world” effect, have also been found to reduce well-being and to increase distress in emerging adults (Schwartz & Finley, 2010).

LIMITATIONS

The present results should be interpreted in light of several important limitations. First, all variables were measured concurrently. As a result, although parental involvement and nurturance were assessed retrospectively, and although psychosocial functioning was assessed in present tense, we cannot rule out the possibility that current dimensions of functioning may have influenced participants’ reports about their parents’ past behavior.

Second, all of the parenting dimensions were assessed globally, referring to the entirety of the participant’s childhood and adolescence. This was intentional in light of the framing of emerging adulthood as a time of reflecting back on one’s childhood and adolescence in totality (cf. Arnett, 2000). However, we do not know whether participants from divorced families completed the parenting measures thinking of conditions occurring before, during, or after divorce. Third, the use of a university student sample may introduce biases by underrepresenting individuals with financial, emotional, intellectual, or social difficulties. Further research with community samples is needed.

Finally, the ethnic breakdown of the sample is both a limitation and an advantage. As a limitation, the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities and of individuals from immigrant families is not consistent with the U.S. population at present. Moreover, the ethnic diversity of the sample is specific to the Miami area, given that Cuban Americans comprised more than half of Hispanic participants and that most of the Blacks were of Caribbean descent (cf. Stepick & Stepick, 2002). Replication with larger proportions of native-born Whites, African Americans, and groups that comprise the majority of the U.S. Hispanic population (Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans; Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003) is needed.

As an advantage, the ethnic diversity of the sample may reflect the changing demographics of the U.S. population. Hispanics are overrepresented among the foreign-born population (Ramirez & de la

Cruz, 2003), and immigrants are comprising an increasing share of the Black population in the United States. Since 2000, one of every two people added to the U.S. population has been Hispanic (Bernstein, 2007), and by 2050, one-quarter of Americans will likely be of Hispanic descent (Huntington, 2004). As a result, gathering data on ethnically diverse samples is an important direction in family research (e.g., King, Harris, & Heard, 2004; Toth & Xu, 1999). The diversity of the sample also allowed us to evaluate the consistency of our findings across gender and ethnicity.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY COURT PRACTICE AND POLICY

The present results have provided substantial support for the “divided world” thesis (Finley, 2006; Marquardt, 2005). The strongest support for this thesis comes not only from indices of perceived parenting, but also from indices of emerging-adult psychosocial functioning and of troubled ruminations – long-term feelings of anger, pain, regret, and hurt. Clearly, a post-divorce arrangement where one parent resides within the child’s primary family system – while the other is marginalized or severed from that family system – does not fulfill the best interests of the child (cf. Finley, 2002). The present findings thus suggest that divorce decrees that include joint physical custody may represent one way to reduce the distress associated with the “divided world” and to enhance quality of life for children of divorce (cf. Warshak, 2007). The present results also suggest that, the more the child’s post-divorce life resembles that of an intact family, the better adjusted children of divorce are likely to be as they enter adulthood.

NOTE

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Gordon E. Finley received a B.A. in Sociology and Anthropology from Antioch College and a Ph.D. in Social Relations from Harvard University. Prior to his present position as Professor of Psychology at Florida International University, he taught at the Universities of British Columbia, Toronto, and California at Berkeley (as a visitor). He publishes empirical research, family policy articles, op-eds, and letters-to-the-editor. His writings focus on fatherhood, divorce, family law reform, and the status of boys and men in contemporary society. He has a book under contract with Wiley-Blackwell tentatively titled: Fatherhood and Psychology.

Seth J. Schwartz received his master's degree in family and child sciences from Florida State University and his doctorate in developmental psychology from Florida International University. His research interests include parental involvement, adolescent and young adult psychosocial development, identity, health risk behaviors, and culture and ethnicity.