

**The Post-Divorce Nonresident
Father-Child Relationship:
A Review of Critical Factors and Guidelines
for Clinical Practice**

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Boca Raton

*The Post-Divorce Nonresident Father-Child Relationship:
A Review of Critical Factors and Guidelines for Clinical Practice*

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Abstract

In the United States, divorce is estimated to occur in approximately 50% of all marriages. As a result, children are increasingly being exposed to the divorce process and are at increased risk for emotional and behavioral difficulties. The maternal preference for child placement following a divorce is well documented and often places fathers in the role of the nonresidential parent. Parent-child relationships frequently continue after divorce and fathers have been shown to play a critical role in child development. Factors that contribute to the quality of the nonresident father-child relationship are not well understood and the primary interest of this literature review is to highlight the post-divorce critical factors that affect the nonresident father-child relationship. After reviewing the literature, the following critical factors are revealed and discussed: 1) frequency of contact, 2) financial child support, 3) parenting style, 4) nonresident father role transition, and 5) the coparental relationship. Current treatment approaches are reviewed and areas for future research are suggested. In addition, treatment guidelines for enhancing the post-divorce father-child relationship are recommended.

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The Post-Divorce Nonresident Father-Child Relationship: A Review of Critical Factors and
Guidelines for Clinical Practice

Chapter 1: Introduction

Impact of Divorce on Children's Mental Health

The overall structure of the typical American family has changed over the last 30-40 years (Bulduc, Caron, & Logue, 2007). Prior to the 1960s divorce was considered a relatively rare phenomenon with only about five percent of marriages ending in divorce (Buldoc et al., 2007; Amato, 2000). Additionally, 90% of American children cohabitated with their married biological parents present (Bulduc et al., 2007). However, over the last few decades the divorce rate has steadily risen in the United States (Videon, 2002). Current estimates suggest that divorce occurs in approximately 50% of first marriages and 60% of second marriages (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001; Portnoy, 2006; Wallerstein, 2005; Cohen, 2002). One out of every six adults in the United States divorces two or more times, and between one-half and two-thirds of those who divorce eventually remarry (Portnoy, 2006).

Half of the divorces in the United States involve children under the age of 18, resulting in more than one million children experiencing parental divorce in a given year (Amato, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 1998, Table 160; Cookston, Braver, Griffin, DeLuse, & Miles, 2006). Approximately 40% of the children in the United States will experience a parental divorce and about 50% of them will be placed at least temporarily in a single-parent household (Portnoy, 2006). Although there is some disagreement on divorce projections in the 21st century, researchers generally agree that they will never return to the pre-1960 divorce rates (Rich, Molloy, Hart, Ginsberg, & Mulvey, 2007).

Over two decades ago, researchers started conceptualizing divorce as a process that occurs over time rather than a single event (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Hetherington, 1999; Cohen, 2002). The process of divorce varies from family to family, and the severity and duration of stressors contribute to these differences. Specifically, the divorce process may include but is not limited to continual interparent conflict, abuse, strained parent-child relationships, general psychological adjustment difficulties for parents and/or children, repartnering, residential transitions, custody disputes, legal separation, and economic hardships (Kelly & Emery, 2003, Parke, Dennis, Flyr, Morris, Killian, McDowell, & Wild, 2004; Wallerstein, 2005; Sobolewski & Amato, 2007; Hetherington, 1999, Rich et al., 2007).

There have been mixed findings in regards to the impact of divorce on child well-being. Specifically, some researchers have noted that children who are exposed to divorce are at increased risk for psychological disturbances and will inevitably encounter negative consequences (Wallerstein, 2005; Portnoy, 2006; Sobolewski & Amato, 2007; Kelly, 2006). In contrast, researchers have also suggested that approximately 80% of children and adults will not encounter any significant emotional or interpersonal problems after a divorce, and will generally fall within the normal range of adjustment when compared to children from intact families (Amato, 2001; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kelly & Emery, 2003). Many researchers believe that the inconsistent findings can be better explained by methodological inconsistencies and the fact that children react to the divorce process differently due to possessing diverse coping strategies (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Ahrons, 2006). For example, protective factors that may decrease the risk for maladjustment following a divorce include authoritative parenting, low family conflict, and appropriate living arrangements (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Portnoy (2006) noted that children who are “intelligent, self-regulated, independent, mature, have high self-

esteem, and have achieved success” have better post-divorce adjustment than children who do not possess the aforementioned qualities (Portnoy, 2006, p. 130). Children with these positive qualities were less likely to blame themselves for the divorce and utilize adaptive coping skills. Despite the discrepant findings, researchers generally agree that many children enduring the divorce process will encounter some level of distress, which may exceed their ability to cope effectively.

Although there is some disagreement on the duration and the amount of distress a child feels following a divorce, many researchers believe that children of divorce will often experience disruptions and more adjustment difficulties than children from intact, married households (Portnoy, 2006, Amato, 2001; Peris & Emery, 2005; Cohen, 2002; Videon, 2002). Cohen (2002) noted that up 50% of children exhibit some emotional distress within the first year following a divorce. Children are at increased risk for continued emotional difficulties when there is parental conflict, parental psychopathology, and financial difficulties (Cohen, 2002). Wallerstein (2005) suggested that after a divorce, children are three times more likely to be referred by teachers for psychological services. Children from divorced families are at increased risk for problems later in life, including instability in interpersonal relationships and emotional distress (Portnoy, 2006; Sobolewski & Amato, 2007; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Hetherington, 1992). According to studies conducted over the past three decades, children often respond with various emotional difficulties, which perpetuate the parent-child relationship change including conduct problems, emotional disturbances, poor interpersonal relationships, and academic difficulties (Amato, 2000; Wallerstein, 2005). According to Wallerstein (2005), children typically feel insecure, and experience persistent anxiety. Parental conflict during the divorce process often leads to internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in children (Cohen, 2002). Specifically,

children may exhibit increased levels of psychological distress such as depression, and are more likely to utilize psychological services when compared to children from intact families (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Amato, 2003; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). According to a Hetherington and Kelly's (2002) study, children who are anxious, antisocial, and insecure prior to a divorce, often carry those negative attributes well into adulthood. In addition, increased levels of depression often continue into adulthood, with both men and women reporting less overall psychological well-being (Portnoy, 2006). Children from divorced families often worry about additional loss and change in their lives, and begin to develop their own view of what transpired during the divorce. Children may feel like they have been abandoned, which can contribute to poor post-divorce outcomes (Kelly & Lamb, 2000). A child's sense of loss is enduring and may increase around holidays, birthdays, and other important holidays (Cohen, 2002). As a result, children tend to blame the successful parent for the other parent's distress and are often motivated to care for the parent that is suffering the most.

Importance of Father Involvement After Divorce

The process of divorce suggests that parents will inevitably separate and live independent of one another's disruptions (Peris & Emery, 2005). Recent estimates suggest that in 90% of divorces, the noncustodial parent is the father and they rarely receive physical custody of the child (Seltzer, 1991; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Dunn, 2004; Schwartz & Finley, 2005). The maternal preference for child placement following a divorce is largely due to the psychological zeitgeist of the 1950's (Kelly, 2006). Specifically, psychoanalytic theory heavily focused on the mother-child relationship and how it relates to the overall development of a child. At the time, many theorists believed lengthy separation between a mother and her child would have long lasting, negative affects for the child. Gender-neutral statutes began to appear in the 1970's,

which stated that children should live with the residential parent for all but two weekends out of a month (Kelly, 2006). However, the gender-neutral statutes were a “one-size-fits-all prescription” and neglected to meet the idiographic needs of the family (Kelly, 2006, p.6).

Although states began adopting statutes in the 1980s that focused on specific family needs, living arrangements for children following a divorce have remained consistent for over 35 years, with children primarily being placed with their mothers (Kelly, 2006; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). In the United States, it is estimated that 11 million men do not live with their biological children, which further contributes to poor father-child outcomes (Sorensen & Zibman, 2001). With the rate of divorce rising since the 1960’s, fathers have been increasingly placed in the role of the nonresidential parent (Schwartz & Finley, 2005). Due to the high rates of divorce and unwed pregnancies, children are being raised in families without the biological father present (Harper & Fine, 2006; Dunn, 2004).

Children of divorced parents and children from intact families reported similar feelings of closeness to their mother’s, 70% to 80% respectively (Portnoy, 2006). In contrast, 70% of children from intact families reported closeness to their fathers, while less than one-third of children from divorced families reported closeness with their father. It is important to note that prior to a divorce, children are often less close to their fathers when compared to mothers, but the actual divorce seems to increase the physical and emotional distance, and further harm the father-child relationship (Scott et al., 2007; Scott, Booth, King, & Johnson, 2007). Closeness between a father and child after a divorce has been associated with better child outcomes (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; King & Sobolewski, 2006). Therefore, the nonresident father-child relationship often changes after a divorce, and the physical separation tends to put a strain on the relationship and decrease overall closeness (Scott et al., 2007). Researchers have placed loss at

the center of the divorce phenomenon and believe the primary loss of the child is the loss of his/her father (Wallerstein, 2005; Scott et al., 2007).

Decades ago, many researchers believed that fathers were only necessary for financial support and providing tangible resources to the family (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). Fathers were viewed as the lone power holders in the family and responsible for making all of the decisions. Views of fathers began to change around the period of the Great Depression and after World War II, when many families were financially poor. Specifically, women started entering the workforce and fathers were no longer considered the only financial contributors to the family. Thus, social scientists began looking at interpersonal factors within the family and how fathers emotionally contributed to the development of the overall family system. Researchers explored the act of childrearing and how fathers influenced the emotional growth of their children. Despite the fact that some negative paternal stereotypes still exist today, studies have consistently shown that fathers play a unique role, and are sensitive and attentive to the needs of their children (Shears & Robinson, 2005; Stone, 2006; Amato & Sobolewski, 2004; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Parke et al., 2004). Specifically, fathers help contribute to the social, emotional, and academic lives of their children (Adamsons, O'Brien, & Pasley, 2007; Dick, 2005; Parke et al., 2004). Paternal involvement has been linked to better adaptive and communication skills in young children when compared to children whose fathers were less involved (Pruett et al., 2003). Fathers who are close to their child after a divorce are more likely to be effective in monitoring, communicating, and teaching their child (Scott et al., 2007).

Many agree that fathers and mothers parent their children differently (Scott et al., 2007). When compared to mothers, fathers are more likely to be involved in play and physical activities with their children. Additionally, father-child play often displays a wider range of arousal when

compared to mother-child play (Parke et al., 2004). Specifically, mothers help a child emotionally regulate, whereas fathers can be viewed as challenging play partners that help teach the appropriate methods of interacting with others. Fathers help teach the skills necessary to read social cues and maintain social relationships (Parke et al., 2004). These developmental skills are important because they help a child facilitate positive interactions with others. When a father is not actively present after a divorce, the relationship with their child will eventually weaken (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Parke et al., 2004). When a father is absent, children are at higher risk for school and peer problems. Researchers attribute the school and peer problems to the lack of socialization a child receives when the father is not present. Reduced nonresident father involvement following a divorce has been linked to increased conduct problems for children (Kelly, 2006). A poor father-child relationship may contribute to poor relational and self-regulation skills for a child, which can continue well into adulthood (Dunlop, Burns, & Bermingham, 2001; Wolchik, Wilcox, Tein, & Sandler, 2000). Two prospective studies of girls followed from 5-18 years old in the US and New Zealand found an increased risk for sexual activity and pregnancy as a result of increased father absence (Ellis, Bates, Dodge, Fergusson, Horwood, Pettit, & Woodward, 2003). Researchers are still not entirely clear as to why the increased risk occurs, but many believe it is due to the increased stressors a girl encounters when a father is absent.

Parent-child relationships continue long after a divorce and it has been shown how critical a father's participation is on his child's overall development. Only recently has research started exploring the variables that contribute to the nonresident father-child relationship quality. Due to the limited research, the relational dynamics of the nonresidential father-child relationship are not well understood. It is essential to understand the post-divorce father-child

relationship, because the quality of the relationship has been found to be consistently associated with children's outcomes (Dunn, 2004; Harper & Fine, 2006). With this in mind, the current literature review will seek to examine the critical factors that affect a nonresident father's ability to form a quality post-divorce relationship with his child. In addition, areas of future research will be highlighted and explored. In doing so, therapists can gain knowledge of how to effectively enhance and improve the nonresident father-child relationship during the therapeutic process.

Chapter 2: Critical Factors Regarding Post-Divorce Father-Child Relationships

Frequency of Contact

Frequency of contact, along with nonresident father financial support, were among the first constructs to be researched in order to determine what positively contributed to post-divorce father-child relationships. Frequency of contact is the most researched of all of the nonresident father-child relationship constructs (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Amato, 1993; Dunn, 2004; Stone, 2006; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). Amato (1993) reviewed 32 studies focused on the relationship between nonresident father contact and child well-being. Amato noted mixed results and found 15 studies supporting the idea that a child's well-being is positively associated with the frequency of contact, 7 noted a negative association, and 10 found no association at all. At the time, the mixed results perplexed researchers and many began to think that nonresident father contact was not beneficial for a child's overall post-divorce adjustment (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Over the past decade, recent studies have uncovered some potential shortcomings with focusing solely on the frequency of contact between a nonresident father and his child. For example, a study conducted in 2002 found that nonresidential fathers who had frequent contact, but were psychologically disengaged from their child, had children with a higher probability of behavioral problems at school when compared to children who were physically and psychologically close with their nonresident fathers (Taanila, Laitinen, Moilanen, & Jarvelin, 2002). Dunn (2004) noted children may feel close to their fathers even when the frequency of contact is low. Amato and Gilbreth (1999) found when children had close relationships with their nonresident fathers, they benefited from more frequent contact. In low conflict or no conflict situations, as the frequency of visits increased, so did the opportunity for nonresident father-child

closeness (Fabricius, 2003). According to Kelly (2006), if high coparental conflict is occurring, increased contact may have a negative affect on a child's well-being due to the mere exposure to the hostility. If parents are engaged in high levels of post-divorce conflict, children may not benefit from frequent contact (Kelly, 2006). Interestingly, a child's contact with his/her nonresident parent may actually increase if the resident parent is under high levels of distress. If contact continues during these time periods, children are often exposed to opposing view points and put in the position to choose between parents. In addition, studies have reported that children do not benefit from frequent contact by nonresident parents who have mental illness or who have been abusive (Kelly, 2003; Kelly, 2006; Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). Nonresident parents who engage in substance abuse or poor parenting practices are not likely to improve the well-being of their child when they spend increased time with them (Amato & Fowler, 2002; Pruet et al., 2003). Coley and Hernandez (2006) found that nonresidential fathers who displayed antisocial traits often had lower involvement with their children indirectly through increased parental conflict.

Thus, recent study findings have suggested that quality nonresident father-child relationships are not simply dependent on the frequency of contact (Dunn, 2004; Kelly, 2006). Dunn (2004) stated that past studies failed to account for how frequency of contact likely mediates other relational variables of nonresident father involvement. For example, frequency of contact alone has been shown to be a poor predictor of child well-being, but when combined with authoritative parenting practices it can improve the quality of the father-child relationship (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Kelly, 2006; Portnoy, 2006). According to Young, Miller, Norton, and Hill (1995), a father's intrinsic support is positively correlated with a child's well-being as well.

According to Dunn (2004), data regarding the pre-separation relationship factors between the child and nonresident father are very limited and often gathered retrospectively. Some researchers have noted that a father's pre-divorce involvement with his child is a weak predictor when it comes to post-divorce involvement (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Dunn, 2004). Other researchers have found that nonresident fathers who were more involved with their child prior to the divorce were more likely to stay involved after the divorce (Booth & Amato, 1994). In contrast, Kruk (1994) noted the opposite and found that fathers who more involved prior to the divorce were less involved post-divorce. Additionally, Seltzer (1998) found post-divorce involvement influenced the custody arrangement between the parents with joint custody being the most optimal. Dunn (2004) believed that the inconsistency in research findings were likely due to the circumstances of the separation, and events that occurred immediately after the divorce. Dunn (2004) reported that the emotional history between a father and his child should be taken into account in order to fully understand the nonresident father-child relationship. For example, if a child has witnessed violence between parents or even experienced abuse or neglect themselves, they have a greater likelihood of mixed feelings towards the father after the separation (Dunn, 2004). While some children may not want to have a relationship with their father in such cases, others may blame themselves for the separation and pursue a relationship (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001).

Researchers attribute the lack of association between pre and post-divorce father-child involvement to the added emotional stressors that co-occur following a separation. For example, the decrease in contact may be due to increased geographical distance. Geographical distance between the parental homes has been found to be an important factor in the amount of nonresident father-child contact (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). Relocation of a parent after a

divorce can have negative affects on the nonresident father's ability to sustain frequent contact. Over time, there is a higher probability that the geographical distance will increase between a nonresident father and his child. According to Kelly (2006), 25% to 45% of children relocate with their custodial parent within two years following the divorce. Relocations of 75 miles or more can negatively impact the nonresident parent's ability to visit and effectively parent. The distance makes it difficult to coordinate schedules and studies suggest that 400-500 miles distance between the resident and nonresident parent are common (Kelly, 2006; Ahrons & Tanner, 2003). Busy work schedules and limited finances place further strain on the nonresident parent-child relationship. When a nonresident father is enduring financial difficulties, they are less likely to engage in frequent visitation (Sobolewski & King, 2005; Dunn, 2004). The reason is not entirely clear, but finances are believed to make travel easier (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). The increased distance may contribute to a decrease in frequency of contact, interaction, and a loss of secure attachment between a child and his nonresident father.

There have been mixed findings in regards to child gender and nonresident father contact. Some studies have reported that a father's closeness with his child is not based on gender (Dunn, 2004). In contrast, studies incorporating two-parent families and reports from nonresident fathers suggest that fathers generally do spend more time with their sons than they do with their daughters (Adamsons et al., 2007; King, 2002). According to large-scale studies using meta-analysis, there is no link between child gender and relationship quality with the nonresident father (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; White & Gilbreth, 2001; Whiteside & Becker, 2000).

The research is also mixed when it pertains to the nonresident father's race and frequency of contact. For example, King, Harris, and Heard (2004) reported that some studies have shown that Black adolescents are closer to their nonresident fathers than White adolescents. In addition,

studies have noted that Black fathers also have more contact with their children when compared to other races (Seltzer, 1991; Scott et al., 2007; Sobolewski & King, 2005). In contrast, other studies have found no differences between Black and White father contact patterns (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). In regards to Hispanic fathers, less is known, but there is some evidence suggesting that they have the lowest level of involvement with their children (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1998; Scott et al., 2007). Specifically, Latino fathers are believed to have less contact than African-American and low-income White fathers (Lerman & Sorensen, 2000). Additional research is needed in regards to how a nonresidential father's race and ethnicity contributes to overall involvement with his child (Coley & Hernandez, 2006).

The child's age may be a factor in determining how much contact is needed to positively impact emotional well-being (Kelly, 2006; Scott et al., 2007). For example, infants and toddlers achieve meaningful relationships with their nonresident father when they have frequent contact and overnight visitation (Kelly & Lamb, 2000; Pruett, Ebling, & Insabella, 2004, Kelly, 2006). Specifically, young children need to have prolonged contact with their nonresident fathers, without lengthy separations, in order to form healthy attachments (Kelly, 2006). When there is no history of domestic violence between divorced parents, children between four and six years old who had one or more overnight visits with their father, had better psychological and social adjustment when compared to children who did not have overnight visitation (Kelly, 2006). Among all young children, consistency of visitation between a nonresident father and his child was a significant predictor of overall adjustment (Pruett et al., 2004). Visitation that occurs on the weekend and during the week, affords fathers the opportunity to engage in both school and leisure related activities. In contrast, every other weekend visits are not adequate enough to establish healthy attachments (Pruett et al., 2004). Younger children who have close

relationships with their mother, have a greater likelihood of forming a close relationship with their nonresident father. However, as children get older they are less likely to maintain a close relationship with their father due to the developmental milestone for increased autonomy from caregivers (Lerman & Sorensen, 2000; Scott et al., 2007). As a result, adolescents are often driven to spend greater time with their peers than with their parents (Furstenburg, 2000).

The custody agreement following a divorce can also have a significant impact on the amount of contact between a nonresident father and his child. The type of custody arrangement a father has with his child can help determine the post-divorce father-child relationship quality (Bokker, 2006). Specifically, the legal decisions following a divorce can determine the amount of time a father spends with his children (Bokker, 2006). Policy is contributing to shared parenting roles, rather than single parent custody with the contribution of the other parent (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). A meta-analysis of 33 studies comparing joint and sole custody found that children in joint custody often had better post-divorce adjustment (Kelly, 2006). Specifically, children scored better among several measures including emotional and behavioral adjustment as well as overall family relationships. Joint custody has been found to increase father involvement and allow for more meaningful relationships to develop between the nonresident father and child. Children who are in joint custody are generally satisfied and report less feelings of loss when compared to children who are in sole custody arrangements (Kelly, 2006). In numerous studies, parents with joint custody agreements reported less interparent conflict when compared to parents with sole custody agreements (Bauserman, 2002; Amato, 2000; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kelly & Emery, 2003). Another meta-analysis incorporating 20 studies found that children in joint custody were better adjusted than children who were in sole custody (Bauserman, 2002). In addition to the meta-analysis, two other studies noted joint

custody advantages over sole custody when interparent conflict was low (Kelly, 2006). With increases in joint custody over the past decade, both parents have increased opportunity for visitation time with their children (Kelly, 2006). When visitation schedules are consistent, children tend to view the father's place as a second home (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

Children often experience numerous changes within the first year or two following the divorce (Anderson & Green, 2005). Specifically, parents may engage in dating, engagement, cohabitation with a significant other, and remarriage. Two-thirds of divorced adults live with a partner for a period of time before marrying (Kelly, 2006). According to Portnoy (2006), three-quarters of divorced men and two-thirds of divorced women eventually remarry. One-third of children will live with a parent who is remarried or sharing living space with a partner before the age of eighteen. In general, the findings have been mixed when it comes to the impact of remarriage on children. For example, it has been noted that when a mother remarries first, the relationship between the nonresidential father and child improves (Nielsen, 1999). In contrast, other researchers have found that the relationship quality actually decreases between a child and the nonresident father when a mother remarries (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). Similarly, some researchers believe that a new parental union will actually decrease father-child contact (Stephens, 1996), while others have found that decreased contact only occurs when new biological children are involved (Manning & Smock, 1999).

More recent studies have found that remarriage of one or both parents have generally been associated with decreased levels of nonresidential father contact (Stephens, 1996; Amato & Sobolewski, 2004; Sobolewski & King, 2005; Kelly, 2006). White and Gilbreth (2001) estimated that two-thirds of the children in the United States who had nonresidential fathers also experienced a stepfather in their family system. Therefore, there is a high likelihood that a child

may grow up with more than one father figure (Dunn, 2004). When a stepfather is present and has a close relationship with his stepchild, the relationship between the biological father and his child can decrease (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004; Stephens, 1996). A negative correlation has been consistently found with contact patterns between a nonresident father and his child when a stepfather is introduced to the family system (Dunn, 2004). According to Dunn, data from two waves of the US National Survey of Families and Households suggested that fathers visited their children just as often, despite being in new partnerships. However, they did find that having new biological children greatly reduced the nonresident father-child contact (Manning & Smock, 1999; Portnoy, 2006; Bokker, 2006). Researchers believe that having biological children with other partners greatly decreases the amount of resources a father is able to give to a particular child (Coley & Hernandez, 2006). Specifically, Manning and Smock (1999) found that new biological children demanded more attention from their father, which contributed to less time spent with their biological nonresident children. In addition, when a nonresident father has a child in another relationship, there is high likelihood of decreased involvement with his children from the previous marriage (Kelly, 2006; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

Financial Child Support

Unlike frequency of contact between the nonresident father and child, the association between financial support and child well-being is much stronger (Amato, 1993; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Specifically, studies have consistently found positive associations with financial child support and child well-being following a divorce (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Seltzer, 1994; King et al., 2004; Scott et al., 2007). Financial child support is positively correlated with a child's standard of living, academic achievement,

physical health, and overall behavioral adjustment (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Sobolewski & King, 2005; Dunn, 2004).

Reported statistics on actual child support payments made by nonresident fathers vary and are not very reliable due to reporter bias (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). For example, most studies exploring child support payments following a divorce rely heavily on residential mother self-reports (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). Mother self-reports are often lower than nonresidential father self-reports, so, the following statistical information should be interpreted with caution (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). Studies conducted in the 1990's generally suggested that despite mothers being awarded child support payments, only one-fifth to one-third of nonresident fathers actually pay some amount of money. In addition, out of all of the mothers who actually received some child support, fathers often paid between two-thirds and 90% of what was actually expected. Divorced mothers have a greater likelihood of receiving child support than non-divorced mothers (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). In addition, child support awards are more common among White mothers when compared to Black or Hispanic mothers. These statistical findings have led to terms such as "deadbeat dad," which is used to represent a nonresident father who does not pay his agreed upon child support payments (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004, p.345).

Many reasons exist as to why a father may not pay child support. The primary reasons are often due to financial difficulties and continual conflict with his ex-spouse (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). When a father is struggling financially, he has to choose between meeting his own needs and the needs of his child and ex-spouse. In contrast, when nonresident fathers are employed, there is an increased likelihood that they will be able to financially provide for their child (Coley & Hernandez, 2006). However, even when a father has the ability to pay child

support, he will sometimes decide not to due to conflict with his ex-spouse. If a father has negative feelings resulting from the divorce, he may not want to pay child support out of resentment towards his ex-spouse. Thus, the affects of child support on the quality of nonresident father-child relationship appear to be indirect.

There is an increased probability of fathers paying child support when they have employment income and a higher education. When fathers are more financially involved with their children, they may have a better understanding of their parental role and what it means to be a father (Bokker, 2006). Researchers have argued that fathers who have more frequent contact with their children are more likely to provide child support (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). Amato and Sobolewski (2004) hypothesized that frequency of contact and child support may also reinforce each other. When a father sees his child often, he may feel more inclined to pay child support as a result of developing a closer bond (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). In addition, nonresident fathers who pay their child support may want to see how it is being spent so they spend more time with their child.

Thus, many researchers agree that frequent contact and financial involvement are important, but acknowledge the fact that it is rather simplistic to only explore these variables when considering something as complex as the nonresident father-child relationship. Past studies on frequency of contact and financial support highlighted the need to study relational and social variables between a nonresident father and his child (Dunn, 2004; Hallman, Dienhart, & Beaton, 2007). The following sections will explore other factors that contribute to the nonresident father-child relationship quality.

Parenting Style

Many studies focused on intact parent-child relationships have primarily explored Baumrind's conceptualization of parenting style in order to help define parent-child relationship quality (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Baumrind's theory divides parents into three categories based on their parenting style, which includes the permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative approaches (Baumrind, 1971). Baumrind's conceptualization of parenting style has been consistently shown to be associated with a child's overall socialization and well-being in the United States (Lim & Lim, 2003). However, studies have been unclear when it comes to parenting style in non-western cultures and further research needs to be conducted.

According to Baumrind, permissive parents tend to be less structured and place few demands on their children (Baumrind, 1971). Parents who engage in permissive parenting tend to believe that they might emotionally hurt their child if they impose too many limitations (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Children with parents who are overly permissive tend to have difficulty regulating emotions and are at higher risk for increased impulsivity and aggression. Following a divorce, parents may engage in permissive parenting due to feeling tired and internalizing high amounts of guilt.

Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakesless (2000) noted that few guidelines exist for nonresident fathers to help aid in the post-divorce transition. Despite the fact that some children continue to see their father after the divorce, the time spent together is not always high quality (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). For example, fathers will often act as visitors rather than fathers, with the focus of engaging in various leisure activities. Often times, fathers tend to be overly permissive, implementing few, if any, limits with their child. These activities are often fun, but have not been found to improve the overall quality of the nonresident father-child relationship. Fathers often

want to make this limited time as enjoyable as possible for their child (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). The infrequent contact can lead a father to assume more of a friend role versus the role of an authoritative parent (Dunn, 2004). The intimacy of the relationship can be lost when there is a lack of daily routine between a nonresident father and his child. Hetherington and Kelly (2002) suggested that fathers often engage in the “every day is Christmas attitude” because of time constraints and the desire to make everything as fun as possible for the child (p. 118). Superficial activities with their child may include going to the mall, theme park, or restaurant (Sobolewski & King, 2005; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). In fact, the nonresidential parent is typically considered the most lenient parent and seldom sets rules. Because of such overly permissive behaviors, nonresidential fathers are frequently viewed as companions rather than parents.

On the opposite end of the parenting style continuum is the authoritarian parent. Unlike a permissive parent, an authoritarian parent attempts to shape, regulate, and control their children in hopes of gaining obedience (Baumrind, 1971). Authoritarian parents try to control their children through rigid disciplinary practices and are often viewed as unloving by their children (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Ironically, the authoritarian parenting style often ends up with a rebellious child that is defiant and resents their parents later in life. Children who grow up with an authoritarian parent are at higher risk for modeling the controlling behaviors in peer relationships. In addition, family conflict is usually high when authoritarian parenting styles are implemented, which has been shown to have negative affects on children.

An authoritative parenting style falls in between the two aforementioned extremes and is considered the most desirable (Baumrind, 1971; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). An authoritative style involves parents who desire to have a child that is both autonomous and disciplined. According to Manning and Smock (1999), only about 40% of fathers engage in a relationship that