

The Role of the Father in Child Development

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CHAPTER 7

Custody and Parenting Time

Links to Family Relationships and
Well-Being After Divorce

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INTRODUCTION

The father's role in child development typically undergoes profound change when the parents divorce. Around much of the world, this eventuality became about twice as likely in the past 40 years as it ever was previously in our history (Shiono & Quinn, 1994). Although divorce rates have decreased since the peak in 1979–1981 (Fine & Harvey, 2006), by the time they reach age 16, the percentage of children who are anticipated to live in a divorced home is between 31% (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989) and 40% (Cherlin, 1992). Chapter 6 discusses many of the changes wrought by divorce in the father-child relationship. The goal of the current chapter, a new one for this series, is to survey what is known about how *postdivorce parenting arrangements* impact the family. In the past, these arrangements included determining which parent would be the child's custodial parent, and how much visitation would occur between the child and the other parent. There is now a widespread movement to abolish the terms *custody* and *visitation*, and replace them with the more neutral terms *parenting plans*, *parenting time*, and *decision-making responsibility* (Emery, 2004; Kelly, 2004, 2007). As of 2005, 26 states had statutes addressing parenting plans (Douglas, 2006). In the European Union and the United Kingdom, the term *parental responsibility* predominates (Lowe, 2005), which both parents legally retain regardless of the residential order. In New Zealand, the 2004 Care of Children Act replaced the term *custody* with *day-to-day care*, and *access* or *visitation* with *contact* (Martindale-Hubbell Law Digest: New Zealand, 2008).

Notwithstanding these attempts to reform nomenclature, many issues facing divorced families (e.g., determining child support, adjudicating relocation disputes, signing for a child's driver's license, taking the child out of the country) require designation of the parent with whom the child primarily lives or to whom the court grants legal decision-making authority. Thus, we

will use the corresponding terms *residential custody* and *legal custody*. We will use the term *parenting time* to refer to the distribution of the time the child resides with each parent.

The form these arrangements take has a very strong overlay of law and policy, perhaps more so than other aspects of father-child relationships discussed in other chapters. Courts and legislatures take jurisdiction over custody and parenting time; what they decree is their primary point of entry or leverage over the divorced family, because they cannot control how (or even whether) parents use their parenting time. Often, courts accept or request advice from mental health professionals, such as custody evaluators. In exercising their authority, policy makers, judges, and custody evaluators (collectively, we refer to these as *decision makers*) implicitly or explicitly face the question of how custody and parenting time can be arranged to best serve divorcing families. We have therefore taken this question as the primary vantage point and goal for this review of the literature: *what guidance the existing empirical research can give decision makers about the custody and parenting time arrangements that work best for children*. Taking this perspective alerts us to gaps and methodological problems in the empirical literature. Thus, a second goal of this chapter becomes *illuminating what directions future research needs to take to ultimately be more dispositive to such decisions*.

The chapter is organized into eight sections. First, we examine the current prevailing custody standard, the Best Interest of the Child standard (BIS), as well as contemporary proposed alternatives to this standard, in historical context. This section reveals that cultural norms about parenting shape custody policy. We argue that research into current public opinion about custody and parenting time is needed to inform the debates about alternative standards, and we present new findings on public opinion.

Second, we examine current custody practice, in terms of both court awards and the processes of arriving at custody and parenting time provisions. This section reveals that while parents typically make these decisions themselves, they bargain within a complex social context, which includes, at a minimum, the law; the advice they receive about the court's application of the law; and, as we illustrate with new data, their own beliefs about the lack of judicial fairness or bias. These social forces constrain their negotiations and affect the resulting distribution of parenting time arrangements.

Third, we examine empirical research that directly compares various custody arrangements, which generally shows that joint custody benefits children most. An issue that arises, however, is the degree to which the research is useful to decision makers, since it may or may not generalize to situations in which the parents disagree about joint custody. We then segue to another discussion of how future research can yield information about likely outcomes from imposing joint custody.

Fourth, we turn to the research on parenting time. We begin by noting that it is universally accepted—and generally honored in law—that a rich relationship with the father (as well as the mother) is in most cases beneficial for children. But there is less agreement about what policy will bring about that strong relationship. We next point out two problems with the research that have compromised the ability of researchers to give more definitive advice.

One problem involves measurement. On the one hand, Kelly (2007) notes that we have had "no reliable measures to accurately record the numerous complexities and variations in contact patterns" (p. 37). We describe two new measures of parenting time. On the other hand, there is no consensus about how to measure the quality of father involvement. We illustrate a new measure that distinguishes between the quantity and quality of parent involvement from the young adolescent's point of view. Another problem is conceptual. Researchers in the past tested simplified models that missed important processes by which the effects of parenting time are propagated. We propose a model in which the mediators of the effects of parenting time on long-term child outcomes are aspects of the father-child relationship, including the quantity and quality of father-child interactions and the child's felt security in the relationship. We argue that the father-child relationship should be considered not only as a mediator of the effects of parenting time, but also as an important outcome in itself.

Fifth, we review the recent studies on parenting time, the father-child relationship, and child outcomes that we feel are more definitive because they avoid some of these problems of the past. There is much evidence in these studies that the proximal effect of parenting time is on the father-child relationship, and that the quality of the ongoing father-child relationship is what propagates the effects of parenting time into the future on various aspects of wellbeing.

Sixth, we evaluate the literature to provide answers to the questions of how much parenting time is necessary to achieve benefits for children in the usual case. Seventh, we do so in the case of especially high conflict between the parents. Finally, we conclude by summarizing the implications for policy and research, respectively, which stem from taking this broad perspective on custody and parenting time.

CHILD CUSTODY STANDARDS

HISTORICAL TRENDS

Child custody standards have historically reflected the gender roles prevailing at the time (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Mason, 1994; Roth, 1976). Under Roman law, men had absolute control over their families and children were considered fathers' property, whereas women had no legal rights. This patriarchal system of male ownership was continued into British common law, which added that fathers were also responsible for protecting, supporting, and educating children. British law, in turn, served as a foundation for early American law, which also mandated paternal custody throughout the 19th century. However, in the early 20th century, when the Industrial Revolution pulled fathers to work outside the home and mothers became children's main caretakers, the trend reversed to maternal custody, especially for children of "tender years."

More recently, constitutional concerns about sex bias, cultural changes in parental roles, and the women's movement prompted states to remove parent gender as a basis for custody and focus instead on the well-being of

the child. The Best Interest of the Child standard was introduced in 1970 as a Model Code under the Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act. It was subsequently adopted by every state, and it remains the prevailing U.S. standard (Freed & Walker, 1986; Kelly, 1994). It also prevails internationally under Article 9.1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Under the BIS, as Kelly (1994) noted, "For the first time in history, custody decisions were to be based on a consideration of the needs and interests of the child rather than on the gender or rights of the parent" (p. 122). The BIS is generally considered to be an improvement over past standards because it accords primacy to children's needs, and because it is egalitarian, flexible, and simple (Chambers, 1984; Warshak, 2007); nonetheless, it has been criticized for being vague and for allowing judges to rely on idiosyncratic biases (Chambers, 1984; Finley & Schwartz, 2007). Because rulings are unpredictable, some argue that it catalyzes parents to battle for custody (O'Connell, 2007).

CONTEMPORARY PROPOSALS FOR ALTERNATIVE CUSTODY STANDARDS

Courts and legislatures have thus recently been urged to consider alternative standards to counter the alleged defects of the BIS. It is important to note that each of these alternatives purportedly upholds the child's best interests as the focus of custody policy.

Primary Caretaker. The Primary Caretaker standard (Chambers, 1984; Maccoby, 1999) presupposes that stability for the child is the factor most critical to the child's well-being, and that the parent who provided the most child care during the marriage should be the one to obtain custody. Although this standard is ostensibly gender-neutral, in practice it promotes a preference for maternal custody, because the child care duties it credits (e.g., preparing meals, bathing, dressing, nurturing) are usually not provided primarily by fathers (Kelly, 1994). Only Minnesota adopted this standard, but repealed it 4 years later (Crippen, 1990).

Approximation Rule. A modified version of the Primary Caretaker standard is the Approximation Rule, first proposed by Elizabeth Scott (1992), and later endorsed by the American Law Institute (ALI) in their influential *Principles of the Law of Family Dissolution* (2002). This standard, too, credits stability as the greatest contributor to child well-being, but recognizes that the secondary parent also has an important role to play. This standard is aimed at determining the distribution of parenting time with each parent: "The court should allocate custodial responsibility so that the proportion of custodial time the child spends with each parent approximates the proportion of time each parent spent performing caretaking functions for the child prior to the parents' separation" (p. 1). Proponents (Emery, 2007; Kelly & Ward, 2002; Maccoby, 2005; O'Connell, 2007) contend that potential benefits include: (a) simplifying and expediting custody determinations, (b) offering a gender-neutral criterion, (c) respecting decisions parents earlier made about child-rearing patterns, (d) providing a means of measuring qualitative factors such

as the strength of parent-child ties and parental competence, (e) reducing the incidence of custody litigation, (f) promoting stability of parent-child relationships, and (g) reducing the intrusion of the state into family matters.

In contrast, opponents (Lamb, 2007; Riggs, 2005; Warshak, 2007) claim that its disadvantages include: (a) it does not consider that there will be changes to the parenting patterns after divorce; (b) it assumes the *quantity* of caretaking predicts the *quality* of the parent-child relationship, but evidence suggests that children typically become securely attached to both parents whatever their respective caregiving duties; (c) there are severe difficulties involved in measuring past caretaking time; (d) it does not consider other parenting functions such as providing a role model or moral guidance, and (e) in practice it is not likely to reduce the level of conflict between parents. Despite the imprimatur of the prestigious ALI's endorsement, only West Virginia has adopted the Approximation Rule.

Joint Custody. The Joint (or Shared) Custody standard is claimed by its proponents to be in the best interests of children because it credits factors even more critical to child well-being than stability: mutual parental responsibility and the children's relationships with both parents. When considering this standard, joint *physical* or *residential* custody (specifying that the child will alternate residence with each parent) is generally distinguished from joint *legal* custody (specifying that both parents retain legal authority to make decisions about the child's education, medical care, religious upbringing, etc.). In 1979, California became the first state to authorize joint custody (Folberg, 1991), but joint legal custody, joint physical custody, or both are currently *permitted* in 44 states (Family Law in the Fifty States Case Digests, 2008). There is a *presumption* in 7 to 10 states in favor of joint legal custody (which means it is customarily ordered even over the objection of one parent). In contrast, joint physical custody is typically authorized only when both parents request it. Only a few states (e.g., California) allow judges the discretion to order it over the objection of one parent, and only the District of Columbia has a joint physical custody presumption. Joint physical custody does not necessarily entail *equal* parenting time with each parent; splits as disparate as 30% vs. 70% often are called joint physical custody (Kelly, 2007; Venohr & Griffith, 2005). A limiting condition in most states is that joint custody (legal or physical) is treated as not appropriate when evidence of domestic violence is produced.

In England and Wales, the 1989 Children's Act gives courts the power to order "shared residence," but it more typically grants instead a Sole Residence order, typically to the mother (Lowe, 2005). In Canada, the 1997 Divorce Act permits joint custody, which may involve equal decision making or equal residential time, or both, but sole maternal residential custody with the father granted access according to a detailed schedule is far more common (Douglas, 2001; Kruk, 2008). Australia currently is the only nation with *presumptive equal physical custody*, the Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006 (see Chapter 20). Where reasonably practicable and unless shown not to be in the best interests of child, it requires courts to order that the child spend equal amounts of time with each parent.

In cases where equal time is determined to be not appropriate, the court must consider a parenting time arrangement that is substantial and significant for both parents (Bates, 2008).

PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT CUSTODY AND PARENTING TIME

The preceding discussion illustrates that custody standards throughout history have reflected the prevailing cultural values and norms regarding parenting and gender roles. It is legitimate that these cultural standards should inform and even constrain custody standards, because parenting values and norms determine whether parents are willing and feel able to assume the custody that is granted to them. Likewise, the current impetus for a new standard reflects ongoing cultural evolution of parenting values and norms. For any new custody standard to accurately reflect contemporary cultural standards, however, the policy makers of today need to be acquainted with prevailing public opinion on custody issues. But, curiously, despite the popularity of polls and surveys in almost every other area of life, public opinion about postdivorce parenting arrangements has rarely been sought. In the next paragraphs, we review what is in fact known about public opinion concerning custody.

The first attempt of which we are aware to assess public opinion about residential custody targeted a restricted slice of the public—young adults attending a large state university (Fabricius & Hall, 2000). The authors asked, "What do you feel is the best living arrangement for children after divorce?" Participants answered using a 9-point Likert scale ranging from "Live with mother and see father minimally or not at all" to "Live with father and see mother minimally or not at all," with the midpoint being "Live equal amounts of time with both."¹ Regardless of how the question was phrased over the course of several semesters, whether students were male or female, or from divorced or intact families, approximately 70 to 80% answered the midpoint category, "equal time" (Fabricius, 2003).

In 2006, an advisory (i.e., nonbinding) ballot question appeared in Massachusetts: "There should be a presumption in child custody cases in favor of joint physical and legal custody, so that the court will order that the children have equal access to both parents as much as possible, except where there is clear and convincing evidence that one parent is unfit, or that joint custody is not possible due to the fault of one of the parents." The proposition received 86% yes votes. Braver, Fabricius, and Ellman (2008) repeated that exact language on a public opinion survey to a representative sample of adult citizens in Tucson, Arizona, asking respondents to indicate how much they agreed with the statement on a 7-point Likert scale. Ninety percent responded

on the "agree" side; 57% responded 7 ("strongly agree") and another 30% responded 6. There were no significant differences by gender, age, education, income, political outlook, whether the respondents themselves were currently married, had ever divorced, had children, or had paid or received child support.

To explore whether such a preference was only abstract and theoretical, or was in fact the preference citizens would like to see in practice, Braver, Fabricius, and Ellman (2008) developed a hypothetical custody case for use with a different representative sample of Tucson, Arizona, citizens. Mother and father were depicted as providing equal amounts of predivorce child care. The parents were further described as reasonably good parents who deeply loved their children, with a family life that was quite average, and children who were normally adjusted. Respondents were asked how they would award parenting time if they were judge, using the alternatives specified in Footnote 1. About 75% chose the option, "Live equal amounts of time with each parent." Almost all the remainder chose "Live with mother, see father a lot." In this scenario, because the parents provided equal amounts of predivorce child care, awards of equal parenting time could reflect adherence to either the Approximation Rule or the Joint Custody standard. However, Votruba (2008) modified the "equally involved" aspect of the scenario into a fully typical scenario, telling new respondents that the division of predivorce child care was "about like average families in which both parents work full-time (both M-F, 9-to-5)." The results were unchanged, suggesting respondents tacitly adhered to the Joint Custody standard rather than the Approximation Rule.

Summary. Custody practices have historically reflected cultural norms about gender roles and parenting; we contend that this is completely appropriate. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, boys' entrance into the company of the men in the community is gradual and regulated over many years. Awarding equal parenting time within such cultural norms would not be in younger children's best interests. Because it is the cultural norm, boys do not attribute fathers' limited involvement with them to fathers' lack of caring for them. In contrast, in our society, the norm has become for fathers to be more involved in children's upbringing. Prohibitions or restrictions on fathers' involvement post-divorce would not be in children's best interests, because within our cultural norm, children are at risk for attributing limited postdivorce father involvement to fathers' lack of caring for them. As we discuss later, that can undermine children's emotional security in their relationships with their fathers and put them at risk for mental, physical, and behavioral health problems.

There now appears to be a strong consensus among the general public that under normal circumstances, equal parenting time is best for the child. Large majorities favor it across several variations in question format, including variation in how much predivorce child care each parent provided. This powerful consensus would appear to lend support to a Joint Custody standard. Awards of equal parenting time continue to be rare, however, as we discuss next.

1. "Lived with mother, saw father (a) minimally or not at all; (b) some; (c) a moderate amount; (d) a lot; (e) Lived equal amounts of time with each; Lived with father, saw mother (f) a lot; (g) a moderate amount; (h) some; (i) minimally or not at all."

CHILD CUSTODY PRACTICE

COURT AWARDS OF CUSTODY AND PARENTING TIME

As several other writers have done (Argys et al., 2007; Clark, Whitney, & Beck, 1988; Maccoby & Mnookin, 2002), we distinguish between arrangements that are *de jure* (as specified in the decree) and *de facto* (as practiced day to day). We shall discuss only *de jure* custody (legal and physical) and *de jure* parenting time in this section; *de facto* parenting time requires consideration of measurement issues and so will await a later section.

De Jure Legal and Physical Custody. According to several studies of state or jurisdiction-level statistics on legal and physical custody in the United States (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; DeLusé, 1999; Fox & Kelly, 1995; Logan, Walker, Horvath, & Leukefeld, 2003; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Seltzer, 1990), mothers obtained primary *de jure* physical custody in 68 to 88% of cases, fathers did so in only 8 to 14% of cases, and joint physical was specified in 2 to 6%. These numbers also comport well with national U.S. figures (Argys et al., 2007; Emery, 1994; Nord & Zill, 1996; Saluter & Lugaila, 1998). Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) report a higher proportion (20%) of joint physical arrangements in California. And as noted earlier, Australia now has a presumption in favor of shared parenting, and statistics show that 15 to 19% of recent cases have equally shared custody and another 11 to 15% have at least 30% with each parent (see chapter 20).

The rate of joint legal custody is more variable across the above studies, from 21% (Seltzer, 1990) to 76% (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992) to 93% (Douglas, 2003). It has also changed much more than physical custody has over time. It is important to note that this change appears spontaneous, that is, not based on corresponding revisions in formal policy such as statute or court decisions. For example, in Canada, joint legal custody increased from 14% to 37% from 1990 to 2000 (Juby, Billette, Laplante, Le Bourdais, 2007). During one longitudinal study conducted by the second author (Braver, Griffin, Cookston, Sandler, & Williams, 2005), joint legal custody doubled (from about one-third to two-thirds) over the 3-year course of the study, despite no discernible changes in any formal or official standard. What apparently did change, however, was that the informal "culture" among the professionals involved in divorce (judges, attorneys, custody evaluators, mediators, etc.) warmed to joint legal custody over the interval, possibly because of findings (e.g., Gunnoe & Braver, 2001; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992) showing its beneficial impact with few downsides.

De Jure Parenting Time. Prior to the 1980s, most decrees either specified the traditional pattern of every other weekend with the nonresident parent, which totals about 14% of the child's time (Kelly, 2007), or simply used a general phrase such as "reasonable," "liberal," or "according to court guidelines," which in practice meant the same traditional pattern. Two studies of randomly selected case files in Arizona conducted 10 years apart (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; DeLusé, 1999) found that in the interim decade there were

increases in the number of decrees that added some visitation during the week to the alternating weekend pattern, and that specified uninterrupted summer weeks with the nonresident parent. Venohr and Griffith (2003) conducted the federally-mandated review of a randomly selected set of case files in Arizona for divorces filed in 2002. They found that by this date, 54% of cases specified 20 to 35% of the days per year as parenting time for the nonresident parent, and 15% specified 36 to 50%. By 2007, only 36% specified 20 to 35% parenting time, while twice as many (29%) specified 36 to 50% (Venohr & Kaunelis, 2008). In Washington State, 46% of fathers obtained at least 35% parenting time in 2007–2008 (George, 2008), and in Wisconsin in 2003, 24% had equal parenting time (Brown & Cancian, 2007). In Arizona the percentage of cases specifying exactly equal parenting time tripled from 2002 (5%) to 2007 (15%). Again, all the changes in practice described in this paragraph were spontaneous, informal and unofficial, not based on formal rule changes.

Summary. More divorce agreements stipulate joint legal custody nowadays than in the past, and in several states, at least, substantially more parenting time is routinely being awarded than the traditional alternating weekend. These trends appear informal rather than based on any official rule changes. Nevertheless, the great majority of families continue the 1970s pattern of children living mostly with mothers. This occurs despite the widespread adoption of the ostensibly gender-neutral BIS in the 1980s, and despite current public opinion that equal parenting time is best for children. To discern why these tendencies now prevail requires examination of the processes by which divorce arrangements are forged, discussed next.

PROCESSES OF ARRIVING AT CUSTODY AND PARENTING TIME PROVISIONS

Litigation. Studies have found that only 2 to 10% of divorcing couples have their custody provisions decided by a judge (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Logan et al., 2003). The rest come to an agreement themselves (with no lawyers, about 30% of couples; with one lawyer, most commonly the mother's, another 30%; with two lawyers, the remainder; Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Hogan, Halpenny, & Greene, 2003) that is then "rubber stamped" by a judge or court official. But getting to this agreement is often complicated and circuitous, involving a large and growing menu of alternative methods of resolving custody disputes.

Interim Settlement Conferences. Parents typically have one or more appearances before the judge, called settlement conferences, before final resolution. During settlement conferences, judges typically will inquire what progress is being made, order parents to special classes, appoint mediators or custody evaluators (as explained in the following sections), and exhort parents toward settling. Some judges will drop clues about how they are leaning, and even if they don't, lawyers typically advise their clients about the judge's reputation for deciding custody matters.

Parent Education. Many parents are sent to a "Parent Education" class during the course of resolving their case (Blaisure & Geasler, 1996). The class is intended to facilitate their negotiations, prevent them from litigating, and improve their agreements (Braver, Salem, Pearson & DeLusé, 1996; Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008). Such programs have become very popular with courts in recent years (Arbutnot, 2002; Blaisure & Geasler, 2000), despite little evidence that they have intended effects (Douglas, 2006; Goodman, Bonds, Sandler, & Braver, 2004; Sigal, Sandler, Wolchik, & Braver, in press), although DeLusé (1999) found that if fathers attended, they negotiated significantly more parenting time.

Mediation. In mediation, a neutral professional helps the couple resolve custody and parenting time disputes (Emery, 1994; Kelly, 2004). Many states require that parents attend mediation before allowing litigation (Douglas, 2006; Tondo, Coronei, & Drucker, 2001). Research has shown only limited success for mediation, but high-quality studies are difficult to do in this area (Beck & Sales, 2001; Emery, Laumann-Billings, Waldron, Sbarra, & Dillon, 2001). Australia now practices "child inclusive" divorce mediation, in which the child meets separately with the mediator, who then artfully conveys the child's wishes and concerns to the parents (McIntosh, Wells, Smyth, & Long, 2008).

Custody Evaluation. In about 5 to 10% of cases, an expert (usually a psychologist) is hired by the parents, who evaluates the family and makes nonbinding custody recommendations (at an average fee, as of 1997, of \$2,646; Ackerman & Ackerman, 1997) (Ackerman, 2007; Gould & Martindale, 2007; Stahl, 1994). Current American Psychological Association guidelines specify that the court appoint only one evaluator, whose code of ethics requires giving fair consideration to each parent. Often, the evaluator's recommendation is made first to the parents, and only if it does not spur settlement will it be sent to the court. There have been several critiques of the legal propriety, ethics, and acumen of custody evaluations in determining what is best for children (Bow & Quinell, 2002, 2004; Martin, 2005; Tippins & Wittman, 2005).

Summary. Few parents have their custody and parenting time provisions decided by a judge. Instead, almost all parents come to agreement themselves. This suggests how historical changes in parenting arrangements can occur without corresponding changes in statutes and precedents. One possibility is that both mothers and fathers have changed in terms of the parenting arrangements they desire, and that currently prevailing decree provisions accurately reflect their sentiments. Regarding those that still opt for mother-custody, Tippins (2001), for example, claims that "most of the mothers who have custody attained it with the father's consent, presumably because the father understood and agreed that the best interest of the children was served by such an arrangement." The other possibility is that input from some combination of judges, attorneys, parent educators, mediators, and evaluators affects what parents ask for and agree to. Thus, we need to examine what

is known about parents' desires regarding custody, and the role of the social and legal context in their bargaining for custody and parenting time.

Bargaining About Custody and Parenting Time. Braver and O'Connell (1998) found that 70% of mothers indicated early in the process that they wanted sole legal custody, and the remainder wanted joint; among fathers, 75% wanted joint and the remainder were equally split between wanting sole mother and sole father. Analogously, but concerning physical custody, Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) report that 82% of mothers wanted sole maternal, while about a third of fathers wanted joint, a third sole paternal, and a third sole maternal. Similarly, Fabricius and Hall (2000) found that two-thirds of students reported that their mothers had wanted to be their primary residential parent, and almost two-thirds reported that their fathers had wanted equal or nearly equal living arrangements or to be their primary residential parent. Yet in all three studies, the parents' ultimate agreements were twice as likely to reflect the mothers' than the fathers' preferences. Most children also want substantially more time with fathers (Amato, 1987; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbush, 1996; Funder, 1996; Parkinson, Cashmore, & Single, 2005; Smith & Gallop, 2001; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Fabricius and Hall used the response scale in Footnote 1 to ask what living arrangement students had wanted, and found that one-half wanted either an exactly equal ("50-50") split of time or close to it (i.e., to live with the other parent "a lot"). In the end, the time they had with their fathers was far less than what they and their fathers wanted, but very close to what their mothers wanted. Why do mothers' preferences prevail?

One possibility is that fathers' stated preferences are only bargaining positions that they are prepared to negotiate away in exchange for concessions on other matters, especially lowered child support payments (Neely, 1984; Singer & Reynolds, 1988; Weitzman, 1985). However, Braver and O'Connell (1998), and Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) specifically investigated this possibility and found that the evidence rejected it. Similarly, Venohr and Griffith (2003) found no evidence that fathers were "gaming" the system by asking for more parenting time to gain advantages in lowered child support. Moreover, Sheets and Braver (1996) found that fathers were less satisfied with the custody agreements than mothers, and that mothers more often got the outcomes they preferred and felt more strongly in control of the bargaining process.

The other possibility is that fathers' preferences are genuine, but whether they fervently pursue them depends on the guidance about their chances they receive from judges, attorneys, custody evaluators, parent educators, and mediators (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Mnookin, 1984; Mnookin & Kornhauser, 1979). If such guidance shifted over time, this could easily account for the findings cited earlier that the rate of joint legal custody doubled in response to informal changes in the attitudes of divorce professionals; that parenting time allocations for fathers in Washington, Wisconsin, and Arizona recently greatly increased despite no formal change in statutes or guidelines; and that fathers' parenting time increased when the parents attended parent education, in which instructors typically explain

that courts desire to keep both parents involved in the child's life. It may also account for Douglas's (2003) finding that in Maine, 90% of families have joint legal custody, though there is nothing in statute to encourage it.

Empirical evidence that it is communication from their lawyers in particular that may be important in leading most fathers to not pursue their preferences for physical custody and parenting time comes from a study of Family Law attorneys attending an Arizona State Bar convention (Braver, Cookston, & Cohen, 2002). A custody scenario was distributed in which the lawyers were asked to imagine they represented either the mother or the father, randomly assigned. The facts of the case advantaged neither parent, but findings showed that attorneys would advise mothers more than fathers that they would likely prevail in seeking physical custody and the majority of parenting time. The same attorneys were also asked about "the slant of the Arizona legal system regarding divorced parents." The results are depicted by the black bars in Figure 7.1. Only 35% thought the system was not gender-biased, while most saw it as substantially biased in favor of mothers. These views did not differ by attorney gender or by whether they primarily represented mothers or fathers. Dotterweich and McKinney (2000) also obtained evidence that attorneys in Maryland, Missouri, Texas, and Washington thought judges preferred to award custody to mothers.

Lawyers' advice may be realistic. Stamps (2002), querying judges themselves in four southern states, found that most indeed had a maternal preference. But even if judges were completely gender-neutral, lawyers' views can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. As one commentator quoted in Newsweek's (2008) article "Not Your Dad's Divorce" explained, "The lawyers are telling them, 'You can't fight this, you won't get it, and it will

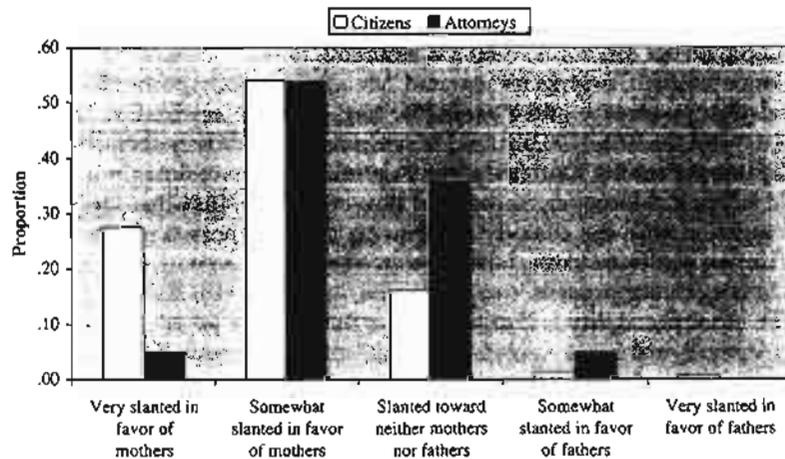


Figure 7.1 Perceived Slant of the Arizona Legal System Regarding Divorced Parents.

Source: From "Experiences of Family Law Attorneys with Current Issues in Divorce Practice," by S. L. Braver, J. T. Cookston, and B. Cohen, 2002, *Family Relations*, 51(4), pp. 325–334. Copyright 2002 by Blackwell Publishing.

cost you a lot of money and heartache. . . . [The few fathers who go on to litigate] have been told in advance they have a chance at winning because they were Mr. Mom before the divorce, or there's an obvious problem with the mother."

Braver et al. (2008) have recently found that the public also believes that today's courts operate with a maternal preference. We asked the Tucson citizens who received the hypothetical custody case in which the parents provided equal predivorce child care how they thought parenting time would actually be allocated in "today's courts and legal environment." Whereas 75% said they would award equal parenting time in this situation, fewer than 25% thought the courts would do so. All of the others thought that mothers would be awarded most of the parenting time. We also asked citizens the "slant" question that Braver et al. (2002) used with attorneys. As can be seen in the white bars in Figure 7.1, only 16% saw the system as unbiased. Citizens actually saw the system as more biased than did attorneys. Thus, even without advice from attorneys, such a widespread view of judicial bias among the public can lead fathers to not pursue their preferences for custody and parenting time.

Summary. The empirical evidence is clear that the majority of fathers (and their children) desire more parenting time, but mothers tend to oppose it. The reason fathers do not bargain harder for it is due to the guidance they receive from professionals, and their own widespread belief that the system has a maternal bias. The above reality appears to prevail despite overwhelming public opinion that *equal* living arrangements are actually best for children, and despite the desires of a great many of the children for such arrangements.

Courts and legislatures need to be well informed about the prevailing cultural norms of parenting and public opinion about custody, and they usually will wish to make policy that fits harmoniously with the zeitgeist, unless the public wants a policy that will not achieve the desired best interests of children or will have unintended consequences. Thus, policy makers need to also be acquainted with the best available empirical evidence about what works best for children and families. We turn next to the behavioral science evidence. We begin with the most direct evidence, studies that provide *comparisons* of various de jure custody and parenting time arrangements.

EMPIRICAL COMPARISONS OF CUSTODY AND PARENTING TIME ARRANGEMENTS

In 2002, Bauserman published a comprehensive meta-analytic review of all the previous research comparing joint vs. sole custody. This review included 11 published and 22 unpublished (almost all doctoral dissertations) studies, comprising 1,846 sole-custody and 814 joint-custody children altogether. His category of "joint custody" included arrangements of joint physical custody as well as sole maternal physical but joint legal custody. Across all the studies, he found that children in joint custody were significantly better off than those

in sole custody (and about as well off as those in which the parents remained married), in terms of general adjustment, family relationships, self-esteem, emotional and behavioral adjustment, and divorce-specific adjustment. The effect size was "slightly greater than what would be considered a small effect size" (p. 95). The joint legal custody cases showed very similar benefits to that of the joint physical custody cases. Since both types of joint involved a "substantial proportion of time actually spent living with each parent" (p. 93), the results were concluded to apply to high amounts of parenting time, as well as the specific label given to the custody arrangement.

These results are indeed probative for families that seek and/or readily agree to joint custody (either legal or physical), as did those summarized in the meta-analysis. It appears conclusive that for such families, empirical evidence strongly supports that such an arrangement will promote benefits or at least not harm families and should be endorsed. As Bauserman (2002) concludes, "courts should not discourage parents from attempting joint custody" (p. 99).

ARE THESE FINDINGS GENERALIZABLE TO FAMILIES IN WHICH THE ARRANGEMENTS ARE IMPOSED, NOT CHOSEN?

Emery, Otto, and O'Donohue (2005) noted that it is questionable whether those same benefits will accrue by *imposing* joint custody on less-than-willing families, because those families who have chosen it in the past may be different in important ways from other families, and those differences may account for children's better outcomes. Bauserman (2002) acknowledged that self-selection bias and confounding remains a plausible rival hypothesis. Incontrovertible support that imposing an(y) arrangement will have intended effects would require an experiment in which families were assigned at random to one of the various arrangements and then compared (Ramsey & Kelly, 2006). Of course, there is no such research, nor will there ever be. However, the viability of the self-selection hypothesis is undermined by the common situation, described earlier, in which many fathers want joint custody and would otherwise have it, but are prohibited or dissuaded from obtaining it. This "funneling" process, in which only a few fathers end up with the custody arrangements they desired, represents a different dynamic than the typical self-selection scenario in which people choose to engage or not in a certain behavior. To the extent that the "funnel" represents blanket advice from attorneys, mediators, and the like to fathers, or maternal resistance to joint custody that is not motivated by well-founded concerns about individual fathers' parenting capabilities (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003), then the current situation could in fact constitute a "natural experiment," in which case the beneficial outcomes may be suggestive evidence of a causal role of joint custody. We currently cannot determine with certainty whether the well-documented benefits associated with joint physical custody are caused by joint custody, or represent self-selection, though we believe that the self-selection hypothesis should be viewed with a new sense of skepticism.

RESEARCH APPROACHES THAT ENABLE GENERALIZATION

Statistical Controls for Predisposing Factors. Notwithstanding, there are three useful approaches that have been attempted or referred to in the literature as a means of correcting for selection bias, or otherwise determining the *causal* effects of custody and parenting time arrangements per se. One of these is the use of *statistical controls*, in which predisposing differences are statistically held constant by partialing or covarying them out (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Differences that remain after such partialing can be interpreted as the differences that would be present *if the two groups of families had been equal on the predisposing factors*. However, this approach is successful only to the extent that *all* the variables (and *only* the variables) that truly are self-selection factors are adequately measured and partialled. Only one study in the literature, Gunnoe and Braver (2001), made a serious attempt to control for all self-selection factors in its comparison of joint legal custody to sole maternal legal custody. They assessed a random sample of 254 recently separated, not-yet-divorced families on 71 predivorce variables that might plausibly differentiate between families later awarded joint legal vs. sole maternal custody. Twenty of these did in fact empirically distinguish the two types of families, and all 20 were simultaneously controlled for in comparison of the families 2 years postdivorce. Results showed that even after such equating, children in families with joint legal custody had significantly fewer adjustment problems than those in sole maternal legal custody.

Differentiating on the Basis of Parents' Initial Preferences. A second approach that can yield the information needed to inform decision makers about the wisdom of *imposing* a certain parenting arrangement on families where one parent is inclined against it is to differentiate families in terms of what parenting arrangements each of the parents preferred early in their divorce proceedings, before the decree was final. Such analyses can distinguish the families in which *both* parents initially agreed to a certain parenting arrangement and thus presumably volunteered for it, from families in which the parents had differing initial preferences and one or both ultimately had an arrangement that in some sense or another was *imposed* unwillingly upon them. Such an analysis requires a prospective longitudinal study in which participating families are assessed first during the period between when the divorce is sought and before it becomes final, and again later, after the provisions have been in effect for some time. Only two studies meet this criterion. Braver and O'Connell (1998) report that in about one-third of families in their random sample, both parents initially preferred joint legal custody (and generally later had it awarded). Of the remaining initially conflicted families, 23% obtained the joint legal custody status the father preferred but the mother initially objected to, and 77% got the sole maternal legal custody status the mother preferred, while the father didn't get the joint legal order he desired. Results showed that when the father got the joint legal custody he wanted over mother's initial objection, he paid more child support and had more later contact with the child than when the mother got the sole legal she wanted over father's initial objection, and, surprisingly, even more than when the two parents agreed to joint legal.

Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) also gathered data on their sample at the predecree interview about initial preferences ("what he or she would personally like in terms of residential [and legal] custody, regardless of what in fact had been or would be requested in the legal proceedings," p. 99). Although this sample was followed for several years, and several articles (e.g., Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991; Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990;) and a monograph (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996) have been written about later outcomes for the family including child well-being, the authors have not as yet performed analyses similar to those above, that can tease out the effects of various parenting arrangements that are imposed upon one of them against the initial inclination of the other. Since their data set is now available to researchers (www.socio.com/srch/summary/afda/fam25-27.htm), perhaps such analyses will be undertaken. Suggestive evidence should be noted, however; while the vast majority of mothers initially indicated they had wanted sole maternal physical custody, children in dual residence were the ones who showed the greatest satisfaction with their parenting arrangements, and were also the best adjusted (Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, & Dornbusch, 1993). If granting fathers' preference for joint physical custody while contravening mother's physical custody desire had been at all deleterious, such an advantage for dual residence should not have appeared. Moreover, the advantage of dual residence remained even after statistically controlling, as described earlier, for such predisposing factors as education, income, and initial levels of interparental hostility.

Natural Experiment. The third approach is the "natural experiment" approach, where either law, policy, or professional norms change, and the typical parenting arrangement award in the jurisdiction changes rather suddenly in response. Such an occurrence can illuminate the policy question of the projected effect of imposing a certain parenting arrangement on families, since it is implausible to assume that parents' average proclivity to prefer a certain arrangement changes as rapidly. Thus, any changes found in outcomes are almost certainly not due to selection bias, but instead to the power of the imposed rule. What such a study would require is grouped data about family outcomes from a sample with the old regime and comparative data from a like sample soon afterward.² Unfortunately, we could locate no completed studies of parenting arrangements using such a design. This is particularly unsatisfying given the opportunities presented by quick changes seemingly regularly introduced in family policy by courts and lawmakers. While Weitzman (1985) purports to be a study of the effects of a legal shift to no-fault divorce, and Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) purport to study the California legislature's adoption of joint custody, on closer inspection neither exploration has the necessary data to convincingly evaluate the respective

2. Care must be taken here that rival hypotheses, such as sudden and concomitant economic changes, are implausible. When such factors remain plausible, closely matched control samples that share that change but not the rule change aid causal interpretation. Relatively longer time passage between the two samples also increases the plausibility of the rival hypotheses.

policies. However, a rare new opportunity is provided by Australia, which we later discuss further.

It might appear that a similar "natural experiment" exists when various jurisdictions are compared, for example, one that has recently passed a new rule vs. another still using the old rule. In the only such study in the literature, Douglas (2003) attempted to use such an occurrence to evaluate New Hampshire's introduction in 1982 of a presumption in favor of joint legal custody. Using data from several counties more than a decade later, she found that 93% of respondents reported indeed having obtained joint legal custody. She compared father involvement in New Hampshire to father involvement in Maine, where no such presumption existed, but found no difference. On further reflection, she noted that Maine was "likely a poor comparison state, as 90% of families in this state also had joint legal custody, even though there is no stated presumption" (Douglas, 2006, p. 134). In general, it is also likely that jurisdictions may be unmatched on many demographic and other variables, rendering futile the attempt to equate on predisposing factors.

To the best of our knowledge, there are also no studies about *de jure* parenting time schedules (exclusive of custody arrangements) that take any of these three approaches. That is, no studies exist of which we are aware that compare alternative *de jure* parenting time arrangements, after controlling in any way for predisposing factors. Thus, despite the currency and urgency of the question, the empirical research provides limited guidance to decision makers about the wisdom of imposing any particular parenting time schedule on families where one parent opposes it.

However, there is a great deal of research that we discuss next about *de facto*, "naturally" developing, parenting time arrangements (some reviewed in Chapter 6). These studies do not equate families on predisposing factors, and thus are not definitive about likely outcomes if the same arrangement is imposed. We begin with the two issues about which there is consensus in the research, practice, and policy communities: That children normally benefit from having a good relationship with *both* parents, and that at least some parenting time with the father is required for such a relationship to develop and be maintained.

RESEARCH ON PARENTING TIME AFTER DIVORCE

The evidence now available that children in divorced families benefit from rich relationships with both their residential and their nonresidential parents leaves little room for debate. For example, in their meta-analysis, Amato and Gilbreth (1999) found that children's well-being was significantly enhanced when their relationships with nonresident fathers were positive, and when the nonresident fathers engaged in "active parenting." A number of studies have found that nonresident fathers' active involvement in routine everyday activities benefited their children (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Dunn, Cheng, O'Connor, & Bridges, 2004; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998; Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman, & Conger (1994). Nord, Brimhall, and West (1997) found that these included academic benefits such as better grades,

fewer suspensions, and lower dropout rates. In their consensus statement on behalf of 18 expert researchers, Lamb, Sternberg, and Thompson (1997) summarized that:

[P]ost-divorce arrangements should aim to promote the maintenance of relationships between nonresidential parents and their children. . . . The majority of children experiencing parental divorce express the desire to maintain relationships with both of their parents after separation. (p. 400)

Not only is it generally recognized within the research community that some parenting time with the father benefits the child, this belief is formally recognized in much public policy. Thus, 26 states' custody statutes declare that "frequent and continuing contact" with both parents is in the child's interests and a foundation of their custody policy (Douglas, 2006). The policy of going further by inserting the "friendly parent" provision (which specifies that an advantage in a custody dispute should go to the parent who is more likely to allow "frequent and continuing contact" with the child and the other parent) into their custody statute is also "widespread and routinely applied throughout the United States" (Dore, 2004, p. 43). Aside from benefits to the child, the parent's right to have at least some access to his child is "generally considered to be constitutionally grounded . . . [it is] extremely rare" for a court not to grant it (Ellman, Scott, & Kurtz, 1998, p. 685).

The most important questions for decision makers include: (a) how much parenting time is necessary or sufficient to achieve its benefit, and (b) what should parenting time policy be when the parents are embroiled in substantial conflict? We contend that answering another question first leads to greater clarity about the first two questions: (c) how does father-child contact achieve its beneficial impact on children? This question requires valid measurement of the amount of contact and clear distinctions between the quality and quantity of father involvement. We explore these two preliminary issues in the next section, followed by a summary of the findings about parenting time, father-child relationships, and child outcomes. Then we return to the discussion of questions 1 and 2.

MEASURING DE FACTO FATHER-CHILD CONTACT AFTER DIVORCE

Several earlier influential studies based on large national data sets found little or no relationship between frequency of contact and child well-being (e.g., Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987; King, 1994; McLanahan, Seltzer, Hanson, & Thomson, 1994), leading to continued skepticism expressed by some researchers about benefits to children associated with amount of contact with their nonresidential fathers (e.g., Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2007; Stewart, 2003). However, the problem may be with the measures of father-child contact used in these data sets. Argys et al. (2007) compared six data sets and concluded that, "What is most striking about the reports of father-child contact . . . and perhaps most alarming to researchers, is the magnitude of the differences in the reported prevalence of father-child contact across the different surveys" (p. 383). In what follows, we discuss

why these measures might be so unreliable, and offer solutions to the measurement problem.

Four of the six surveys analyzed by Argys et al. (2007), as well as other prominent surveys³ and recent studies (e.g., Coley & Medeiros, 2007) employ ordinal category scales that ask how many times father-child contact has occurred (e.g., "once a week," "one to three times a month"). Ordinal category scales poorly represent amount of parenting time. In practice, it is difficult to tell if respondents report number of visits or number of days. For example, every other weekend at the father's home could be reported as "one to three times a month" if respondents count it as two visits, or "once a week" if they count it as 4 days. As a measure of number of *days*, the scale is not interval. For example, Table 7.1 shows the average percentage of days of contact represented by each of the categories of the widely used National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979. Following Argys et al. (2007), these percentages are based on the midpoint of each category (e.g., "one to three times a month" = 24/365 days a year = 6.6%). There are narrow gaps between adjacent categories at the lower end of the scale, and wide gaps at the upper end. Furthermore, increases in parenting time between "once a week," or 14.2%, and "two to five times a week," or 50%, are likely to be the most potent for conferring benefits, but the wide gap obscures the levels at which these benefits might accrue, reducing the guidance that can be provided to courts and policy makers. As a measure of number of *visits*, the scale would not even be ordinal with respect to parenting time if extended visits in lower categories resulted in more yearly parenting time than shorter visits in higher categories. For example, one visit per year could represent more parenting time than one visit per month if the former lasted all summer and the latter lasted just the weekends.

Ordinal category scales were actually designed to measure *frequency of visits*, rather than *amount of parenting time*. The designers of these scales apparently viewed visits as brief "reminders," to be measured by the frequency (per year, month, week, or day) with which they occurred. More frequent visits do not necessarily entail greater amounts of time, because amount of time equals the product of frequency and length of visits. Nevertheless, it is common for researchers to draw conclusions about amount of parenting time from data collected with ordinal category scales. More frequent visits do entail more *transitions* between parents; thus, researchers should more properly draw conclusions about number of transitions rather than amount of parenting time when using ordinal category scales. Because many of the studies that have found weak or inconsistent relations between father-child contact and child outcomes used ordinal category scales, the findings may tell us more about the effects of transitions than parenting time. Future research may be able to tease apart effects of amount of parenting time and number of transitions. In some studies (Johnston, Kline & Tschann, 1989;

3. These include the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH87, NSFH92; Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988), Britain's Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children 1991 (ALSPAC91; Golding, 1996), and Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth 1994-1995 (NLSCY94; Juby et al., 2007).

Kline, Tschann, Johnston, & Wallerstein, 1989) the two have been substantially correlated, with r 's ranging from about 0.45 to 0.65, but not in others (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996).

New measures of amount of parenting time are needed that have good psychometric properties and that are sensitive to different parenting time schedules (Argys et al., 2007; Smyth, 2002). One approach we recommend is to use *quantitative scales* that reflect the percentage of the child's parenting time spent with the father. For example, Fabricius and Luecken (2007) asked young adults four questions about the typical number of days and nights they spent with their fathers during the school year and vacations.⁴ Fabricius and Braver (2003) provide an example of the utility of a similar scale for identifying the amount of parenting time at which changes in the rates of fathering behaviors occur. Smyth (2004) describes the telephone survey designed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies to reveal not only the amount of parenting time, but also the different schedules parents and children followed.

Another approach we urge is to use *qualitative category scales* (e.g., "some time," "a moderate amount of time"). A qualitative category can capture different parenting time schedules that yield similar yearly amounts of parenting time. Fabricius and Luecken (2007) showed that the qualitative living arrangements (LA) scale developed by Fabricius and Hall (2000)⁵ had good test-retest reliability ($r = 0.86$), and that reports from matched pairs of young adults and parents correlated highly ($r = 0.92$) and were nearly identical in terms of mean levels. Using data from 582 young adults in that study who completed both the LA and the quantitative scales, we calculated the mean percent of the child's parenting time with the father for each LA category.⁶ As shown in Table 7.1, the LA categories were well distributed from lower levels to higher levels of parenting time (for simplicity, we combined the father-residence categories). Thus, the categories are readily interpretable, and can provide practical guidance to courts and policy makers regarding the levels of parenting time that may be associated with increases in child well-being.

4. "Considering the most typical living arrangement you had after the divorce, what was (a) the number of days you spent any time at all with your father in an average 2-week period during the school year [0 to 14]? (b) the number of overnights (i.e., sleepovers) you spent with your father in an average 2-week period during the school year [0 to 14]? (c) the number of school vacation weeks out of 15 (Christmas = 2 weeks, spring = 1 week, summer = 12 weeks) during which your time with your father was different from what it was during the school year [0 to 15]? And (d) the percentage of time you spent with your father during those vacation weeks above that were different from the regular schedule [0% to 100% in 10% increments]?"

5. "Between the time [your parents/you] got divorced and now, which of the following best describes [your/your child's] living arrangements?" The 1-9 response scale is described in Footnote 1.

6. We counted an overnight visit as a full day, a daytime visit as a half-day, and a day during vacation as a full day. Referring to variables (a)–(d) in Footnote 4, the number of half-days per week (D) = $(a - b)/2$. The number of full days per week during the school year (S) = $b/2$. The number of full days per week during "different" weeks (V) = $d \cdot 7$. Yearly percent of time with father = $(D \cdot .5 \cdot (52 - c)) + (S \cdot (52 - c)) + (V \cdot c)/365$.

Table 7.1
Mean Percentage of Days of Father-Child Contact Represented
by the Categories in Two Scales

NLSY79 category	% of total year this translates to	Fabricius and Luecken (2007) living arrangements (LA) category:	% of total year this translates to
Once in last year	0.3%	Lived with mother, saw father	
2-6 times a year	1.1%	minimally/not at all	4.6%
7-11 times a year	2.5%	some	13.3%
1-3 times a month	6.6%	a moderate amount	22.3%
About once a week	14.2%	a lot	34.3%
2-5 times a week	50.0%	Lived with both equally	44.8%
Almost every day	92.6%	Lived with father	75.2%

CONCEPTUALIZING AND MODELING THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Sophisticated discussion of the question of how much parenting time is necessary or sufficient to achieve its benefit depends on having models that incorporate theoretically informed, rather than intuitive, distinctions between quantity and quality of father involvement, and that specify processes by which those aspects of involvement affect child well-being. In what follows, we first briefly illustrate the lack of consensus about what constitutes high quality father involvement. We then present a model based on our research that specifies processes by which the quantity and quality of fathering relate to parenting time and child adjustment.

Although there have been calls to improve conceptualization of father involvement (e.g., Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999; Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Palkovitz, 2002), there is currently no agreement on the construct of high-quality father involvement (Argys et al., 2007). Furthermore, measures are often constrained by the items available in data sets that were not designed on the basis of any theory of father involvement. Table 7.2 (left side) illustrates the divergence of approaches in four recent studies. Both Sobolewski and King (2005) and Stewart (2003) have a similar construct of *relationship quality*, but use different types of items to tap it. Sobolewski and King used three items about the child's feelings about the father or the relationship, and one about the father's behavior toward the child. Stewart used three items about activities father and child do together. Conversely, the same types of items often appear in different constructs, sometimes within the same study. For example, shared activities or spending time together is an indicator of both *relationship quality* and *authoritative parenting* in Stewart, *active fathering* in Hawkins et al. (2007), and *father-child positivity* in Dunn et al. (2004). Items for shared activities or spending time together do not appear at all in Sobolewski and King.

Researchers who have constructed their own scales also employ different sets of constructs; e.g., *instrumental*, *expressive*, and *mentoring* involvement

Table 7.2

Constructs and Items in Four Studies of High-Quality Father Involvement and the Dimensions They Would Indicate in Adolescents' Descriptions of Their Relationships With Their Parents

Study, Construct and Items	IN	RE	EQ
Sobolewski & King (2005)			
<i>Father-child relationship quality</i>			
Likely you would talk to father		x	
Admire father			x
Overall relationship			x
Father praised or complained			x
<i>Responsive fathering</i>			
Father explains reasons		x	
Father talks over decisions		x	
Father changed mind because of child's ideas		x	
Stewart (2003)			
<i>Relationship quality</i>			
Went shopping together	x		
Played a sport together	x		
Went to movie, play, museum, concert, sports event	x		
<i>Authoritative parenting</i>			
Worked together on school project	x		
Talked about import personal or school issues		x	
<i>Closeness to father</i>			
How close do you feel to father			x
Dunn et al. (2004)			
<i>Child-father positivity</i>			
Enjoyment of father			x
Warmth in relationship			x
Confiding		x	
Time spent together	x		
<i>Child-father conflict</i>			
Level of punishment			x
Levels of parent and child upset			x
Frequency of disagreement			x
Hawkins, Arnato, & King (2007)			
<i>Active fathering</i>			
Contact	-	-	-
Shared activities	x		
Communication		x	
Emotional closeness			x

IN = Interaction; RE = Responsiveness; EQ = Emotional Quality of the Relationship

(Finley & Schwartz, 2004), *executive, socio-emotional, caregiving, and instructive* functions (Fox & Bruce, 1996), and *cognitive, emotional, parenting, and instrumental* competence (Coley & Hernandez, 2006). The constructs in these different scales do not overlap, in terms of having similar types of items as indicators; for example, the indicators of *parenting competence* in Coley and Hernandez are indicators of all three constructs in Finley and Schwartz.

In our own longitudinal study of the role of fathers in adolescent development, we sought to discover the dimensions of father involvement that young adolescents themselves see as important, because those aspects should carry meaning to adolescents about their fathers' caring. We recruited 393 families with a 7th grader, equally divided between Anglo-American and Mexican-American families, and between intact and stepfather families (see Baham, Weimer, Braver, & Fabricius, 2008, and Schenck et al., in press, for sample details). We asked them to describe their relationship with each of their parents in open-ended interviews⁷ when they were in 7th and 10th grade.

Adolescents generally produced 150 to 200 words about each parent (resident mother, resident biological father, resident stepfather, and non-resident biological father). Regardless of which parent they described, adolescents at both ages spontaneously evaluated their relationships with their parents along three dimensions:

1. *Interaction* between parent and child, which refers to the amount of time the parent spends *doing* things with the child (e.g., "She does a lot with us." "Sometimes he'll take me out to basketball." "Most of the time we really don't spend time with each other.").
2. *Responsiveness* of the parent, which refers to the reliability of the parent's responsiveness to the child's requests or needs, including talking with or helping the child (e.g., "He's always there for me." "He tries not to ignore me." "When I ask for help, she's always too busy").
3. *Emotional quality* of the relationship, which refers to the positive or negative emotions in the relationship (e.g., "He can make me feel better." "She's nice but she can be mean." "He yells at me a lot.").

Working from transcripts of recordings, coders reliably (r 's generally > 0.85) classified statements into the three dimensions and rated each statement as a positive, neutral, or negative evaluation (coding criteria available from the first author). Adolescents seldom referred to other parent

7. "I'd like you to take a few moments to think more about your (target parent). [Q1] Tell me everything you can think of about your (target parent). Think of anything you want to say about who he is, what he likes to do, his work, anything like that. Say whatever comes to your mind. [Q2]. Now, think of your relationship with your (target parent): how he treats you, what he does for you, how he talks to you, and about the time he spends with you. Tell me what kind of person he is and how you two get along together. Try to think of all of those things and think of it as the story of your (target parent) and your relationship with him. [Q3]. What else can you tell me about your (target parent) and your relationship with him? [Q4]. Think now of any changes in your relationship with your (target parent), or if the relationship has changed over the past few years. Tell me about that, and if the changes have been good ones or bad ones."

behaviors, such as discipline, monitoring, teaching values, or economic provisioning, although these could also be reliably coded. Table 7.2 shows how the various items that other researchers have used to assess the quality of father involvement would be represented by these three dimensions.

Thus, adolescents spontaneously distinguished between the *quantity* of time their parents spent interacting or doing activities with them, and the *quality* of their interactions in terms of the reliability of the parent's responsiveness. They also distinguished these two aspects from the emotional climate of the relationship. These three dimensions of parent involvement are notable for their similarity to the central constructs in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), in which parent availability and responsiveness to the child both contribute to the security of the child's emotional connection to the parent, and ultimately to the development of healthy independence. Parent availability and responsiveness convey meaning to the child about the parent's caring.

Figure 7.2 shows our conceptual model relating these dimensions to parenting time and child adjustment. The model distinguishes between the quantity (father-child interaction) and the quality (father responsiveness) of father involvement, and specifies their theoretical roles in mediating between parenting time and adjustment. Father-child interaction and father responsiveness should independently predict the emotional security of the relationship. Parenting time should impact interaction rather than responsiveness, because parenting time sets upper limits on the amount of interaction, but should not constrain the father's ability to respond when asked or approached. The effects of parenting time on adjustment should be mediated by amount of interaction and the emotional security of the relationship.

These hypothesized processes were supported in several preliminary tests of this model using reports from 7th graders about their nonresident fathers. First, parenting time in the past year, as reported by adolescents and mothers using a quantitative scale similar to the one in Footnote 4, correlated significantly with interaction (adolescents, $r = 0.41$; mothers, $r = 0.38$), but not with responsiveness. This suggests that parenting time does not elicit responsiveness, and that responsive fathers were not the ones who had more parenting time. Second, father-child interaction mediated the association between parenting time and the emotional quality of the father-child relationship, and the emotional quality of the relationship mediated associations between both interaction and responsiveness and adolescent

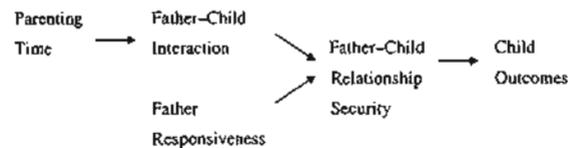


Figure 7.2 Conceptual Model Relating Parenting Time to Quantity and Quality of Father Involvement, Father-Child Relationship Security, and Child Outcomes.

adjustment, as measured by parent and teacher reports of internalizing and externalizing. Finally, interaction and responsiveness compensated for each other in predicting the emotional quality of the relationship. Adolescents who reported the closest relationships with their nonresidential fathers had *either* highly responsive fathers (regardless of amount of interaction), *or* at least moderate amounts of interaction (regardless of father responsiveness).

Other research in related fields is beginning to specify in some detail the processes by which parent-child relationships serve as sources of risk and resilience. Disrupted parent-child relationships are hypothesized to cause emotional insecurity in children regarding their parents' love and ability to care for them (e.g., Davies & Cummings, 1994; Troxel & Mathews, 2004; Wolchik, Tein, Sandler, & Doyle, 2002) and to disrupt children's emotional regulation processes, thereby establishing enduring dysregulations in children's physiological stress responses, promoting pathophysiology in the brain and body (McEwen & Wingfield, 2003) and contributing not only to behavior problems (El-Sheikh et al., 2009) but also to hypertension, heart disease, infectious diseases, and other illnesses (Markovitz & Matthews, 1991). These biopsychosocial models hold promise, in conjunction with improved measures of parenting time and father involvement, for revealing how parenting time can affect children of divorce in the long term.

DE FACTO PARENTING TIME, THE FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP, AND CHILD OUTCOMES

Some early researchers noted associations between father-child contact and father-child relationships, but in general researchers in the past were more focused on associations between contact and other outcomes, such as child internalizing and externalizing symptoms. One early exception, Buchanan et al. (1996), found that adolescents whose parents divorced in 1985-1986 and who had four or more overnights in a 2-week period (28% time) were "equally happy, if not happier, with their relationships" with both parents (p. 72), and were more satisfied with the amount of contact than those in sole (mother or father) residence. Among adolescents in sole mother residence, those with some parenting time (i.e., vacations only and no overnights, one overnight per 2-week period, two or three overnights) were closer to their fathers than those who had little or no parenting time.

Recent studies using ordinal category scales (Dunn, et al., 2004; King, 2006; Sobolewski & King, 2005) find strong associations between frequency of contact and father-child relationship quality. Notably, Aquilino (2006) found that frequent contact during adolescence was the most important predictor, among other measures of father involvement, of close relationships with fathers in young adulthood. Cashmore, Parkinson, and Taylor (2008) found that overnight stays were associated with better quality father-adolescent relationships than daytime-only contact. Peters and Ehrenberg (2008) found that contact predicted higher levels of affective, nurturing fathering, which was likely an indication of father-adolescent closeness. Fabricius (2003) reported that more parenting time was associated with young adults feeling

closer to, and less angry at their nonresidential fathers, and Luecken and Fabricius (2003) reported similar findings with a measure of perception of parental caring during childhood.

Our model specifies that effects of parenting time on father-child relationships, and ultimately on child outcomes, are mediated by quantity of interaction. Struss, Pfeiffer, Preuss, and Felder (2001) found that quantity of interaction during visits predicted adolescents' positive feelings about visiting, and Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) found that quantity of interaction, as well as frequency and length of visits, was related to the father-child relationship. Consistent with the mediational role of interactions, studies (Buchanan & Maccoby, 1993; Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Kurdek & Berg, 1983) have found that quantity of interaction predicted children's adjustment better than did parenting time.

Simons, et al. (1994) and Amato (1994) were the first to find beneficial effects of close relationships with nonresidential fathers on children's well-being *independent of closeness to mothers*. Recently, White and Gilbreth (2001) and Manning and Lamb (2003) also controlled for closeness to mothers and found that adolescents' closeness to nonresident fathers was associated with fewer behavior problems and higher academic success.

Mediational models that move beyond simple, direct associations between parenting time and child adjustment have begun appearing with some frequency. Buchanan et al. (1996) and Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) were the first to discuss visitation, father-child relationships, and child adjustment as a mediational chain. They noted that amount of visitation was related to closeness, and close relationships were related to positive outcomes, but amount of visitation was not directly related to positive outcomes. Amato and Gilbreth's (1999) meta-analysis confirmed that two dimensions of the father-child relationship (i.e., closeness, and father behaviors such as listening to the child's problems, giving advice, explaining rules, monitoring and helping with school work, engaging in projects, and using noncoercive discipline) were more closely related to child outcomes than frequency of contact, but they did not examine relations between frequency of contact and those dimensions of the father-child relationship.

Whiteside and Becker's (2000) meta-analysis found evidence between studies that closeness of father-child relationships mediated the effect of frequency of contact on child internalizing. However, they did not control for the mother-child relationship or parent conflict. Amato and Sobolewski (2001) were the first to test directly the mediational role of parent-child relationships. In their model, the predictors were divorce and parent conflict (rather than parenting time), and the outcome was well-being in adulthood. The three candidate mediators were children's socioeconomic attainment, their marital and relationship stability, and the quality of their relationships with their parents in adulthood. Quality of relationships was the only significant mediator, and father-child and mother-child relationships had independent effects. King and Sobolewski (2006) modeled the mediational role of father-child relationships, controlling for mother-child relationships, in the connection between frequency of contact and adolescent well-being. Results revealed that there was a significant indirect effect of frequent contact

on adolescent well-being, and that the beneficial effect of contact was not restricted to close father-child relationships.

Although it has sometimes been hypothesized, there is no evidence that mother-child relationships suffer at higher levels of parenting time. Instead, mother-child relationships remain constant as fathers' parenting time increases. Buchanan et al. (1996) reported this was true across their four visitation categories within sole mother residence, and Lee (2002) reported that it extended as well to dual residence as defined by Buchanan et al. Fabricius (2003) and Luecken and Fabricius (2003) reported similar findings, and also reported that as parenting time approached equal, relations with both parents were equally good and resembled those in intact families.

HOW MUCH PARENTING TIME IS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN?

We are now in a position to draw conclusions concerning the amount of parenting time necessary to achieve a high-quality father-child relationship, which in turn confers its benefits on child outcomes. We agree with most current writers (Kelly, 2007; Lamb, 2004) that the weight of the evidence argues that the current minimum alternating weekend visitation is, in the typical case, too little. First, these parenting time arrangements are largely disdained by the children themselves, especially as they age and get perspective (Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Fabricius, 2003; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000; Parkinson et al., 2005; Smith & Gallop, 2001). Considering the dissatisfaction of the children and the fathers, and the rates at which fathers dropped out of children's lives and minimized their financial support, any fair assessment of the parenting time patterns of the 1970s is that "they haven't worked." There is strong evidence, backed by theory, for relations between contact (even as measured by ordinal category scales) and father-child relationships. And there is strong evidence, backed by theory, for relations between parent-child relationships and child outcomes. These findings show benefits up to and including equal parenting time, and there is no evidence that increased parenting for fathers negatively impacts mother-child relationships or mothers' well-being, but there is evidence that lack of parenting time negatively impacts fathers (Umberson & Williams, 1993).

In the statement that summarized the consensus of 18 expert researchers, Lamb, Sternberg, and Thompson (1997) wrote that:

To maintain high-quality relationships with their children, parents need to have sufficiently extensive and regular interaction with them. Time distribution arrangements that ensure the involvement of both parents in important aspects of their children's everyday lives and routines—including bedtime and waking rituals, transitions to and from school, extracurricular and recreational activities—are likely to keep nonresidential parents playing psychologically important and central roles in the lives of their children.

This includes significant time during the regular school week. An emerging consensus is developing (Lamb, 2004; Braver & O'Connell, 1998) that a

minimum of one-third time is necessary to achieve these criteria and that additional benefits continue to accrue up to and including equal (50–50) time.

CUSTODY AND PARENTING TIME WHEN THERE IS HIGH CONFLICT

One of the areas of greatest debate in the literature concerns parenting time and custody when there is high conflict between parents.⁸ It is not disputed that high amounts of conflict between the parents are deleterious to their children (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Emery, 1982; Grych & Fincham, 1990; Krishnakumar & Beuhler, 2000). Instead, what is under debate concerns the amount of parenting time that is advisable when the conflict level is high. Some early studies (Amato & Rezac, 1994; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978) found that more frequent contact in high-conflict families was related to poorer child outcomes. Johnston, Kline, and Tschann (1989) found that among the very high-conflict families entrenched in custody disputes that composed their sample, greater amounts of visitation in sole-custody arrangements were generally harmful. Such findings have led some commentators (e.g., Amato, 1993; Emery, 1999) to advocate precluding shared custody and/or limiting parenting time for the nonprimary parent when high conflict prevails. For example, Stahl (1999), in his guide for professional custody evaluators, opines "high conflict parents cannot share parenting" (p. 99). Similarly, Buchanan (2001) writes "when parents remain in high conflict, joint custody is . . . ill-advised" (p. 234).

However, the previous research is in fact quite mixed on this issue. Buchanan et al. (1996) did not find that greater amounts of visitation were harmful in high-conflict families. Even Johnston et al.'s (1989) finding was restricted to sole custody families; the children in joint physical custody arrangements (in which children spent 12 to 13 days a month with their fathers) did not have worse adjustment than those in sole custody. Healy, Malley and Stewart (1990) and Kurdek (1986) found the opposite pattern, that more frequent visitation was actually associated with fewer adjustment problems when parent conflict was high. Fabricius and Luecken (2007) addressed the issue by testing one of the more comprehensive biopsychosocial models to date. They found that the long-term effects of parent conflict and parenting time on young adults' health outcomes were mediated by young adults' relationships with fathers and their ongoing distress surrounding their parents' divorces. Importantly, more parenting time was beneficial to father-child relationships in both high- and low-conflict families, and served to counteract the negative effects associated with parent conflict.

8. Because of the complexity of the issue and because of space limitations, we are not including here conflict that reaches the level of physical violence. Lamb and Kelly (in press) have a good discussion of this, and reference the quickly changing consensus view observed by Jaffe, Johnston, Crooks, and Bala (2008) and Kelly and Johnson (2008) that types and duration of the physical violence must be distinguished.

The divergence of findings on this question may be partly explained by whether researchers measured frequency of contact, or amount of parenting time. Most researchers measured frequency of contact, and by extension, number of transitions (Amato & Rezac, 1994; Crosbie-Burnett, 1991; Healy et al., 1990; Hetherington et al., 1978; Kurdek, 1986), and those results are mixed. However, results were consistent among the three studies that measured amount of parenting time. Buchanan et al. (1996) and Fabricius and Luecken (2007) found that more parenting time was not harmful in high-conflict families, and Johnston et al. (1989) found that dual residence was not harmful in families referred to court services for custody disputes. Thus, sometimes studies indicate that more *transitions* between conflicted parents' homes can be harmful, presumably because they expose children to more conflict. However, there are two ways to limit transitions: One is to eliminate some visits, and the other is to combine some visits into longer, uninterrupted time periods. In the first case amount of parenting time would decrease, and in the second it would increase. The second approach remains viable—and is no doubt preferable—for high-conflict families because there is no evidence that greater *amounts* of parenting time are harmful for most children of conflicted parents, or that dual residence is harmful for children whose parents are involved in lengthy custody disputes. Instead, evidence suggests that father-child relationships can be strengthened through increased parenting time in high-conflict families as well as in low-conflict families, and that a warm relationship with the father or the mother can buffer or ameliorate the harmful aspects of conflict (Sandler, Miles, Cookston, & Braver, 2008; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998).

There are other considerations that make questionable a policy of limiting fathers' parenting time when high conflict prevails. First, such a policy assumes the level of conflict is exogenous, immutable, and not controllable by the parents or by the authorities, but Lamb and Kelly (in press) discuss the many interventions courts now have available to help parents reduce the level of conflict and shield children from it when it does occur, and to identify the small percentage of nonresident parents for whom limited contact is appropriate.

A second concern with the policy that parenting time should be limited under high conflict is its perverse incentive and the faulty message it sends. Attorneys are thus tempted to tell parents that the safest way to ensure that the other parent's parenting time is limited is to exaggerate the amount of conflict that occurs. Instead of giving parents an incentive to manage their conflict, the policy provides the opposite, an instigation to escalate it, with its attendant harmful impact. To see this point vividly, imagine a parent driving two children in the backseat of her car. The children are squabbling and quarreling, driving the mother to distraction. Finally, in exasperation, she pulls over, stops the car, turns around, and says: "That does it. Johnny, since you are not the 'primary' child, you are out of here. You are banished from the car and hereafter from the family." Such a practice is ludicrous to imagine; instead, any good parent will take some action intending to quiet the conflict while retaining both children. Our policy regarding parenting time in a high-conflict family should be analogous.

Third, a blanket policy discouraging parenting time when there is high conflict fails to recognize the dynamics of the conflict. For example, Kelly and Emery (2003) argue that:

[A]lthough high conflict postdivorce is generally assumed to be a shared interaction between two angry, culpable parents, our clinical, mediation, and arbitration experience in high conflict postdivorce cases indicates that it is not uncommon to find one enraged or defiant parent and a second parent who no longer harbors anger, has emotionally disengaged, and attempts to avoid or mute conflict that involves the child. (p. 353)

Hence, a decision maker ought to discern the reasons, instigation pattern, and dynamics of the conflict, not just the existence of it, in making parenting arrangement decisions. The "friendly parent" provision discussed earlier directs the fact finder to make just such an inquiry.

Summary. The soundest conclusion to date is what Lamb and Kelly (in press) conclude: Unless it is severe or violent, "inter-parental conflict . . . should not be used to justify restrictions on children's access to either of their parents." (p. 12).

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS

We summarize the conclusions we have arrived at for custody and parenting time policy:

1. There is clear and strong public support for equal physical custody, and strong public condemnation of courts as unreasonably gender biased in their usual custody and parenting time proclivities.
2. The literature clearly supports *permitting* any kind of custody and parenting time arrangements to which both parents freely agree. Specifically, courts should not discourage or prevent parents from joint custody if they both desire it.
3. The literature supports the benefits of joint *legal* custody in most circumstances even when it is imposed over the objections of one party. Of course, there are some exceptions, such as protracted unilateral abuse (Braver & O'Connell, 1998), where it should not be ordered.
4. The outcome literature is less definitive about the desirability of mandating equal physical custody when one party opposes it. Although those in joint custody are better adjusted, strictly speaking, there is no causal evidence about the impact of mandated equal physical custody on children and the parents. However, there is reason to suspect that findings of beneficial outcomes for children in joint physical custody may not be simply due to self-selection.
5. The common finding from previous research that frequency of contact (measured by ordinal category scales) is weakly related to child outcomes should not be overextended to conclude that parenting time is weakly related to outcomes, for two reasons. First, frequency of contact

(and number of transitions) is not the same thing as amount of parenting time, and second these earlier studies tested the zero-order correlation between contact and outcomes, rather than theoretically informed mediational models.

6. The literature does not support a presumption that amount of parenting time should be restricted in cases of parent conflict, though for some conflicted parents the number of transitions may be harmful.
7. While more definitive data may soon become available (see below), it is not necessary for researchers to take a firm position on mandated joint physical custody. In disputed cases, courts no longer face a black-and-white dichotomy (sole vs. joint physical custody), but rather must direct parents to a point along a continuum of how parenting time should be distributed.
8. In the typical family, more parenting time than the traditional alternating weekend visitation is required to achieve the well-recognized benefits of two involved parents, each with a close relationship to the child. An emerging consensus is that that a minimum of one-third time is necessary to achieve this criterion and that benefits continue to accrue as parenting time reaches equal (50-50) time.
9. Attaining desirable changes in *de jure* parenting arrangement practice may not require legislation, court rulings or any other kind of official imprimatur. Since parents' bargaining appears to be strongly affected by the informal guidance they receive from judges, custody evaluators, parent educators, and mediators, and (especially) attorneys, all that is likely required is a change in this informal professional culture of belief. We believe our review of the evidence here provides strong support for such a change.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

1. Research should attempt to be more clearly directed at the precise questions decision makers need to know to make the best decisions and policy on behalf of divorced families.
2. Most importantly, future research needs to use research designs that better answer the question of what arrangements should be preferred when one of the parents does not prefer it or even actively opposes it. Thus, the causal question needs better answers. Three appropriate designs were discussed: those that statistically control for predisposing (or self-selection) factors; those that condition on each parents' initial preferences; and those that take advantage of natural experiments when policy shifts. Just such a natural experiment is presently occurring in Australia, and researchers there such as Parkinson, Smyth, and Cashmore are poised to exploit that rare opportunity.
3. Researchers need to use more sophisticated measures of parenting time that do not group the most meaningful gradations into overly coarse categories, and do not confuse amount of parenting time with frequency of contact.

4. Researchers need to test more sophisticated theoretical models of the mediational mechanisms by which parenting time produces beneficial effects, and to move beyond simple formulations about the relative importance of quantity versus quality of father involvement. This will help answer the question of how much parenting time is enough, as well as suggest ways to improve the quality of the contact, the father-child relationship, and ultimately the family's outcomes.
5. Researchers need to suggest better ways of dealing with postdivorce conflict between the parents, such as the program of Cookston, Braver, Griffin, DeLusé, & Miles (2007). The simple view that high amounts of conflict imply that parenting time should be minimized and shared parenting avoided produces perverse incentives for the custodial parent to maintain conflict, inhibits the child's relationship with the other parent and thereby makes it even harder to deal with the conflict, and ignores the reality that most parents can successfully learn to minimize conflict when they are motivated to do so.

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