Urban, Greg. 1991. *A Discourse-Centered Approach to Culture: Native South American Myths and Rituals.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

———. 1996. *Metaphysical Community: The Interplay of the Senses and the Intellect.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Webster, Steven S. 1977. Kinship and Affinity in a Native Quechua Community. In *Andean Kinship and Marriage,* ed. Ralph Bolton and Enrique Mayer. Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, Publication 7.

Weismantel, Mary. 1995. Making Kin: Kinship Theory and Zumbagua Adoptions. *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 4:685–709.

Wilk, Richard R. 1988. Maya Household Organization: Evidence and Analogies. In *Household and Community in the Mesoamerican Past,* ed. Richard R. Wilk and Wendy Ashmore. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Yanagisako, Sylvia J., and Jane Collier. 1987. Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender and Kinship. In *Gender and Kinship: Essays Toward a Unified Analysis,* ed. Jane Collier and Sylvia J. Yanagisako. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Yanagisako, Sylvia J., and Carol L. Delaney. 1995. Naturalizing Power. In *Naturalizing Power: Essays in Feminist Cultural Analysis,* ed. Sylvia J. Yanagisako and Carol L. Delaney. New York: Routledge.

Chapter Thirteen

Parenting from Separate Households: A Cultural Perspective

David Jacobson, Joan H. Liem, and Robert S. Weiss

In the United States, many parents live in separate households although they share responsibility for raising their still immature children. Most such couples have come to this arrangement after a time of marriage and living together; others have never married, although they once lived together; and still others never have lived together at all (cf. Bray and Depner 1993). It is much more likely now than in any earlier generation that parent couples not living together will attempt to share parental responsibilities rather than permitting one parent (usually the mother) to carry these responsibilities alone. Much of this has come about as a result of changes in beliefs about the needs of children for access to both parents and about the abilities of fathers as well as mothers to care for children (Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch 1996; Maccoby and Mnookin 1992).

Whatever the reasons for this arrangement, parenting from separate households presents problems for parents and children. The problems include challenges to assumptions about families and households and changes in the logistics of domestic life. The first entails beliefs about roles, relationships, and resources; the second deals with the demands of deploying those resources. In this chapter, we examine the ways in which two-household families experience these problems.

We base our discussion on interviews with parents and interviews and projective tests with children in twelve families, in each of which the parents were attempting to raise the children from separate households. The families were identified from listings of divorces in Massachusetts court records. We selected couples who were within two years of their divorce decrees and who had at least one child aged six to eleven. The parents ranged in age from the late twenties to the early forties. Eleven of the families were Caucasian; one was African American.

In each family, we conducted qualitative interviews with both parents and with one, two, or three children. (The youngest child we interviewed in any of our families was five.) We also collected projective test material from the children. Two of us (Jacobson and Weiss) divided the interviewing of the fathers between us. A third member of the research team (Liem) interviewed all of the mothers. An advanced graduate student in clinical psychology interviewed the children. Most interviews took place in families' homes, although a few, at the request of informants, were conducted at the interviewers' university offices.

Interviews were taped and transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed using the techniques of issue-oriented analysis (cf. Weiss 1994). Interview materials were coded into fairly inclusive categories (e.g., "boundary issues"). Some coded categories had already been developed during the data collection stage, through discussions and exchange of memoranda among the members of the research team. Materials within code categories were summarized and interpreted. Draft reports were exchanged among researchers for discussion, interpretation, and revision.

A Cultural Perspective

Whatever else it is, parenting from separate households is a cultural problem. It is a cultural problem because many of the difficulties entailed in two-household parenting derive not from the attributes of the persons involved but rather from socially defined ideas and ideals about families, households, and the relationships within and between them. The effort to parent from separate households is constrained by people's cultural ideas about what constitutes a family, about what it means to be a parent, about relationships between parents and between parents and children, about relationships within and between households, and about the management of resources.

Although diversity characterizes marital and domestic arrangements in the United States (Del Carmen and Virgo 1993), it has been suggested that middle-class Americans subscribe to a set of beliefs that constitute what may be called the "standard model" of families and households (Skolnick 1991). In this model, the family is nuclear, neolocal, and coresidential. That is, upon marriage, a husband and wife are expected to establish a household of their own and that household will contain only nuclear family members. Others may reside in a household, but that situation is seen as exceptional and one that is to be avoided when possible. When children reach adulthood, they are expected to live independently in other households. Moreover, spouses typically pool resources and share household and parental tasks (although resource management and the division of labor are variable). In this model, the members of the family/household are entitled to one another's attention and affection. Upon divorce, ex-spouses should dissolve their combined household and move apart and establish (or join) separate households. Although cooperation in post-divorce parenting may be an ideal, ex-spouses are expected to be independent agents, neither pooling resources nor sharing domestic rights and duties.

That these ideas are cultural is evident when they are seen in comparative perspective. People in other cultures hold quite different assumptions about households and families (cf. Bohannan 1971). For example, in societies with unilineal descent groups, the functional domestic unit is not the freestanding nuclear family but rather the larger kin group within which it is contained. The descent group is the unit of resource management and it is the group in which various tasks, including those of parenting, are shared. That is, parental responsibilities are distributed across different individuals in the same descent group, a pattern reflected in the extension of kin categories (e.g., "mother," "father") to group members other than biological parents. Moreover, it is assumed that members of such descent groups will reside together, either in multigenerational households and/or in neighboring houses, which, although physically separate, are conceptualized as a single social unit.

The Ashanti of West Africa illustrate the role of cultural beliefs in the organization of familial and household relationships (cf. Abu 1983; Clark 1989; Fortes 1949, 1950, 1969). Among the Ashanti, parenting from separate households is customary. Traditionally a woman was expected to live with her husband when her children were young, but to live with her kinsmen (e.g., mother, brothers and sisters, and other matrilateral relatives) when her children were old enough to begin to participate in the activities of the matrilineal descent group. Consequently, husbands and wives would live, for a significant period of their marriage, in separate households. When mother and children moved to reside with members of their descent group, children typically shuttled back and forth between parental households. In this duolocal system, husbands and wives were not expected to coreside or share resources, although both were expected to take active roles as fathers and mothers. In this regard, the Ashanti have had a pattern of co-parenting from separate households. Such co-parenting worked because the parents were autonomous agents and household boundaries were permeable, with children moving freely back and forth between them.

The difference between the models of the Ashanti and middle-class Americans underscores the role of cultural beliefs and expectations regarding the ease or difficulty in parenting from separate households. It also pinpoints the source of a salient problem associated with the American family: the issue of defining (and, after divorce, renegotiating) boundaries. In American single household families, there are often problems regarding how resources such as earned income, space, and material possessions are to be shared. Couples in which both spouses work must negotiate the extent to which the income of each is accessible to the other. Some have separate bank accounts and pool money from their separate accounts only for what they agree are shared expenditures. Space in single household families is not always entirely shared.

The husband may have his den, workshop, or office, which is considered distinct from the shared household, and the wife may have her own spaces. There are various assumptions about what goes on in the shared household with the "sharedness" often less than complete. Indeed, when people move from a single household to a two-household situation, it is sometimes with the expectation of resolving issues of control over finances and space.

However, in two-household parenting arrangements, people often discover that despite having established separate households, struggles continue over what is to be shared and not shared. These struggles now focus on the accessibility of each parent's household to the other parent's entrance and use: to telephone calls and visits with the children in which the other parent comes into the home and spends time there. They also take the form of renegotiating responsibilities for the continued financial support of children. In single household families, there seems to be an underlying assumption that, whatever the emphasis on separateness, resources ultimately are pooled and that all family members have relatively easy access to what is defined as family space. In two-household families, the operating assumption appears to be what's mine is mine and what's yours is yours. Under these circumstances, there is a necessity to clearly define boundaries. The need to establish these boundaries in moving from a single household to a two-household arrangement seems inescapable. On the physical level, negotiations must go on regarding access to each other's physical space, especially as it is used for child care. On the economic level, decisions must be made about who pays for what child-related costs. And, on the emotional level, boundaries must be established around those ideas and feelings that are to be shared between ex-spouses and those that are not.

Differences among the couples attempting to parent from the separate households we studied reflect the extent to which they continue to hold the assumptions of the standard model of the American middle class or have changed their beliefs to bring them into accord with their changed situations. Although we cannot generalize from our set of informants, their experiences suggest the following hypotheses. Where people define household boundaries as permeable, there is less difficulty in co-parenting from separate households; where people assume role flexibility (i.e., the division and distribution of parental tasks across persons), there is less difficulty in co-parenting from separate households. In short, we posit an inverse relationship between household boundary permeability and parental role flexibility on the one hand, and the difficulty of post-divorce parenting on the other.

In this study, we define "difficulty in co-parenting" in terms of several related aspects (or dimensions) of interaction. In our view, the most important criterion is the level of conflict between parents and their ability to manage it. Other criteria are the ability to distinguish between co-parental and ex-spousal relationships, the capacity to function jointly as parental authorities, and the involvement of children in the parental relationship. On the basis of these criteria, we differentiate between couples who demonstrate more or less difficulty in co-parenting. In less difficult cases, conflict between parents was infrequent, and when it did occur, they were able to resolve or manage it; parents shared information about their children and made decisions together with respect to them; and they supported one another's parenting efforts. In more difficult cases, parents demonstrated an inability to interact without conflict and an inability to resolve or manage the conflict when it began; they did not share information or decision-making regarding their children; and they undermined one another's attempts to parent. (For a fuller discussion of the classification of co-parenting types, see Howard 1996.)

Household Boundaries and Parental Relationships

Among the parents we interviewed, the permeability of household boundaries ranged from those that were relatively "closed" to those that were relatively "open." In some cases, people were deeply concerned about their ex-spouses having access to their households. Some mothers changed the locks on their doors and threatened to take out restraining orders. Others told the children to meet their fathers outside because they were no longer welcome inside the family home. In still others, fathers retained keys to the family home, spent time with the children in it, and had more or less comfortable access to the refrigerator as well as other family space.

At the closed end of the continuum, one woman's comments illustrate the tension surrounding the issue of establishing boundaries.

> [My ex-husband] was coming inside to pick up the boys. I haven't wanted him to come inside the house, but he stores a lot of stuff downstairs and he was supposed to have gotten it out a couple of months ago. It's a mess down there. I was having some work done, and I said, please come and clean up, and he never did it. I found out a few times about him being here, so I just need to figure out something.... I don't trust him. He is just going to take what he wants. So there's a big mess. When he comes in, he is not respectful of my stuff. One day he came, and I asked him to please call me forty-five minutes [before] he was leaving, so I could be here because it takes him [that long] to get here.... He didn't call and he got here and I wasn't here and so he broke into the bulkhead and pulled it all apart. And now animals can get in there and he won't fix it.

This problem is also evident in the comments of a father, describing the tensions between him and his ex-wife on his access to her house.

> [My ex-wife] had a lot of bad feelings about that [his coming into the house]. [T]here was a period where I still had things in the house and she felt that I was coming into the house when I shouldn't.... [My daughter] would forget something in the house. She would have a key. I'd tell her [I'd] go into the house and get it and [my ex] would get mad at me. She said she was going to get injunctions

against me so I'd never come in the house. You know . . . threatening me with an injunction for breaking into the house.

At the other end of the spectrum, the boundaries between households were looser and family members entered and exited as though they were still a single unit. One father described his access to the house he used to share with his wife:

I usually pick [the children] up on Friday nights. I usually see them maybe once during the week. [My ex-wife] works one night a week so I go over there and see 'em. [W]e jointly own the house, so I'll do work for her if she has some major repairs or something to do around the house. [I]t's like we're married, but we're not married. . . . I could go and see the kids or do [things] with the kids any time, and there's no problem. It's a very loose type structure as far as going back and forth and seeing the kids. It's not as strict [as the situation with my ex-wife's] friends who are divorced. I mean most of them throw out the husband and that's it. They don't want any part of them, they don't want them near the house, they don't want anything to do with them. [Our situation] is not like that.

The permeable end of the continuum is also evident in the case of a couple, who, although divorced and living in separate households, exchanged services and support across residential boundaries. The father described the arrangement this way:

Although we're independent, I'll call her occasionally. I'll be in the middle of cooking and I'll lose the recipe card and can't remember [if] I'm supposed to bake it for thirty or forty minutes, I'll call her up. How long do I bake it for? And she calls me if her car doesn't sound right, that kind of stuff.

They also adjust their domestic routines to accommodate one another's schedules.

I just call up a day or two ahead of time and say I'm going to come and grab the kids, and I take them for a couple of days at a time . . . and she'll call and say can you watch the kids for four or five hours. She'll drop them off at my house or I'll go and pick them up. If I unexpectedly get a day off from work I can call her up and take the kids for a couple of hours. It's not a problem. It's very, very flexible that way.

Moreover, they keep one another informed about their children when residing with the other parent.

If one of the kids gets a hangnail, you know, if it's really really minor, you know, we don't call the other parent. But if it's something serious we'll call . . . if one of the kids gets sick we call. . . . For example, when my youngest one broke his arm, I happened to be working. He had broke his arm playing at her house. Before she left for the hospital she called me and says, hey, Tommy broke his arm. I'm taking him to the hospital. She told me what hospital she was going to. And she called me later and let me know how things worked out. As it turned out I was lucky enough [to get] another guy come in and cover for me on my job. So I went up and I met her at the hospital and it worked out. You know, he [the son] was all upset and crying and whatnot. When I got there and started talking to him, you know, he calmed down.

They also cooperate in dealing with common problems, as the mother indicated in the following remarks.

We do talk about the kids. Tommy had trouble with school, we both decided it was best that maybe [he] see a psychiatrist. Everything is basically discussed . . . and it's very open . . . any problems with the kids. I've had situations here where Tommy just got so out of control and I, I'm losing it, and I will call him [her ex-husband] and say hey, could you maybe talk to him. We had situations arise . . . me seeing somebody, and Tommy felt threatened. So, he sat down with both of us, and we talked to him and explained that we're still friends, we can't live together but that doesn't mean that we don't care about them. We tried to really let the kids know that even though we're not together, we're still together for them and we very much work as a team.

In between these end points, there are situations in which household boundaries are relatively impermeable, but in which there is flexibility in the exercise of parental roles. For example, in one family, ex-spouses manage their households independently and do not depend on one another for domestic support. Rather, each has developed skills (or added to their role repertoires) that formerly had been exercised primarily or exclusively by the other. One father explained how he has developed into a cook.

I can't fix them [the kids] a gourmet meal . . . anything like that. I go look at a book, I'll make something. And they eat it. They don't throw it away. We had spaghetti last night and it's fine. I was buying Stouffer's type lasagna at one point. We got tired of that. I made my own lasagna from scratch.

The mother described the way in which she too has become self-reliant in domestic matters.

He asked me to sign some paperwork on the car. I took it to him, gave it to him because it wasn't in my name. I had been doing the paperwork and put a lot of money into it. . . . I decided to go and get a new car. . . . This man thinks that I cannot function without him. In the meantime, I had a new car sitting in a parking lot. Mine. And I had done all of it, without him.

Although they manage their households independently of one another, they view themselves as a parenting team and cooperate in support of their children's well-being. The father explained:

Even though we're divorced . . . our interests and our decisions for the kids . . . [are] the same. There wouldn't be any kind of conflict there. We're able to work

it out as parents together as opposed to they're with me, I'll make the decision type of situation. As a matter of fact today we were talking about Bobby's studies. And we both sat and discussed it and mutually agreed what we should, if he doesn't do well in the school, that he will not be allowed to pursue athletics in eighth grade. And that kind of a thing we do work out.

They also keep each other informed about their children, as is evident in the father's comment regarding school meetings:

> [W]e attend most things together where the kids are concerned. And if there's a meeting at the school for some particular reason . . . because of a problem, something like that, we will . . . we will go together. And we understand what our roles are. And both . . . and everybody knows that we're separated . . . but we still are parenting this child. Not as one individual parent carrying the whole load.

Resources

Sharing parental responsibility between households produced problems in resource allocations. Most of the mothers and fathers we interviewed attempted to minimize their contributions to the households of the other parent, which might lead to arguments over which parent was responsible for the costs of children's expenses such as clothing or camp fees. In other couples, fathers provided a set amount to the mothers' households. In these couples, too, there could be arguments over how to deal with such unanticipated costs as medical bills. The father in one of these couples said:

> There was an issue, back when we were looking at the divorce agreement, where she wanted me to be responsible for all unpaid medical bills and all glasses and all unpaid dental bills. And I said, "No way, they'll be down at the doctor every day. I'll be flat broke." We finally came to what the lawyers said would be the only thing that would really pass, is that we split the bills.

Expenditures in the other household became, in one instance, a matter of dispute. The mother objected to the father giving the children money as a reward for the chores they performed in his household. The father was aware of the mother's objections and her feeling that his practice made more difficult her own relationship with the children:

> She absolutely hates it when I give the kids money on a weekend. It's not every weekend, but occasionally I'll take them out and buy them something, just give them ten bucks or something at the end of the weekend, for doing a whole bunch of things for me. And she says, "That's no good for them and I find that they won't do anything for me and I don't know how to deal with that." But I'm not going to be cheap with them because she thinks it's a bad idea.

It is not the father's practice in itself that is problematic for the mother so much as its being a practice to which she had explicitly objected.

In general, what seemed to work best were arrangements understood and accepted by both mothers and fathers. Although the availability of resources is certainly problematic when parenting from separate households (as it is in other types of households), the parents' assumptions about those resources are critical: what they are or should be, how they should be managed, and who should decide about their distribution.

Most couples defined the household, rather than the family, as the proper reference point in making economic decisions. They believed that resources should be available to all within households, but that households should be economically independent of each other. The unit of resource management is the newly established parental household (mother's and father's), not the parenting couple nor the (former) family of parents and children.

Parental Partners

A peculiarity of the two-household parenting arrangement is the advent of new partners, some of whom live part of the time within the mother's or father's household. The new figures may become quasi-parents to the children, although only one of the parents we interviewed has given them this role. The parent in the other household can accept the new figure, complain about or otherwise oppose the new figure's presence, or attempt to avoid confronting the reality of the new figure. Yet, inevitably, the new figure affects everyone.

When one parent objects strongly to the other parent's new partner, communication and coordination between the parents can suffer, and the children can be put into difficult situations. One father permitted his preoccupation with his ex-wife's new partner to lead to interrogations of their children. The children felt forced to lie in order to protect the mother and, also, to prevent the father from becoming irrational. The older child, a girl of about fourteen, described dealing with the father when he brought her and her younger brother back from a visit and the mother wasn't at home to receive them.

> We'd just kind of tell him, she must have just run to the store. Or that she said that she was going out but she'll be back in a few minutes. Or she ran over to a friend's house. Something like that. And most of the time lately she's been home. It went through . . . this period of time when she'd be home like a half hour after the visit ended. Which was fine with us, but then we'd have to listen to him. She was usually out with her boyfriend. And we didn't want to tell my father that.

These are situations in which children feel caught in the middle between parents in conflict (Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch 1996). The children, because they wanted to retain honest and caring relationships with both parents, hated the experience. Most parents recognized that the children wanted

to protect their relationships with each parent. In consequence, most parents avoided intruding into their children's relationships with the other parent. Parents told us repeatedly, "I never ask." Asked what she knew about the children's experience in the father's home, a mother said: "Well they don't want to talk about it and I don't ask too much."

There were problems with the policy of not discussing events in the other household. It meant not talking about a vital part of the children's lives. Questioning of the children about their lives between visits constantly impinged on a sort of blocked out area, the area of things the parent and children implicitly have agreed not to discuss. Parents become less accessible to children in the area of the children's relationships with the other parent.

The appearance of a new partner was often disturbing to children. Some children eventually learned to accept the new household arrangement, but many maintained reservations, and a few seemed bitterly resentful of a new figure, despite the passage of time. From the children's perspective, the mother's boyfriend and the father's girlfriend are strangers in their households with whom they must compete for their parent's attention and, occasionally, for other resources as well. A few of the children with whom we spoke had learned to accept a parent's boyfriend or girlfriend, but most had reservations and some were quite resentful. However, parents might give unjustified weight to indicators that their potential new partners were accepted by the children. Their own need for someone who might share their lives easily gave rise to a misreading of how their children actually felt about the new figure. For example, one father said about his adolescent daughter and his girlfriend: "Actually my daughter and my girlfriend probably get along. My daughter and my girlfriend both went to the ballet and they had a great time." The daughter, however, was quietly resentful of the new girlfriend. She felt that her father was unnecessarily considerate of the girlfriend, sometimes to his children's disadvantage. She gave as an example, the way the father had people sit in his car:

> When we're around his girlfriend, he treats her like the queen. She always gets to sit up front in his car. Me and my brother are squashed in the back, because it's a little sports car.

Logistics

Parents may differ in their views about household boundaries, parental relationships, and resources, but they can, through a process of negotiation, minimize those differences or at least manage them. However, even when people can agree on the tasks and responsibilities of co-parenting, logistical problems appear to be unavoidable. These were most evident in establishing, maintaining, and implementing the movement of children between households, especially when the households were geographically distant and the children were small.

Here, too, parental flexibility seemed valuable. However, most couples, whatever their willingness to be flexible, had to deal with schedules that were not only complicated but were also constantly changing. A shift in the work schedule of either parent, the event of a vacation, a change in the children's school schedule, an after-school program, or a child's invitation to a friend's weekend birthday party could require parents to modify their times with the children, and thus change what may have been long-established plans. As a result, parents were required almost constantly to give attention to the scheduling of the children's movement between households.

Even without these inescapable changes, moving the children between residences could be complicated. One father said:

> I know it's tough on the kids because they spend at least two days a week with me, and then three days, four days with my ex-wife, and every Saturday and Saturday night or Saturday night and Sunday during the day with my parents, depending on what my schedule is. And the kids are basically living out of a suitcase. It's tough on them that way.

Parental insistence on a particular visiting schedule can sometimes be hard on the children, especially on older children who may have scheduled activities of their own. If the parents live in the same neighborhood this can be less of a problem. But if they live far enough from each other so that going with one parent removes a child from the milieu of the other, there can be cost to the child. An early adolescent girl said:

> My cousin and her friend had a party at my friend's dancing school place. And I was with my Dad that weekend and I said, "Dad, can I please stay with Mom just this weekend, so I can go to the party?" And he said, "Well, I'm not sacrificing a weekend with you. If you go with your Mom two weekends then you're coming with me two weekends." So I tried to make it that I would go with him two weekends and with my Mom two weekends, but I couldn't fit it that way, because I had too much homework. So I had to miss the party because of my weekend with him. I heard it was really a lot of fun. My best friend goes, "Why didn't you go to the party?" And I had to tell her. And I asked her if it was fun, and she said it was a blast. They had music, I guess they had kind of like a pizza party. They had a lot of fun. And I wish I could have been there.

It seemed that those couples who could maintain flexibility in scheduling, so that they could respond to their own needs and the needs of their children, did best in managing the logistical complexities of co-parenting from separate households.

The Emotional Experience of Parents and Children in Two-Household Arrangements

In two-household parenting, parents may alternate between being a single parent with sole custodial responsibility for the children and being the

noncustodial parent separated from the children. The mothers and fathers we interviewed were with the children very different amounts of time. Most of the children lived most of the time with their mothers. In several of the cases, the children were resident in the father's household only for two days every other weekend, with additional occasional visits to the father for an evening. In several other cases, this pattern was understood as basic, but the father and mother shifted from it as the father found time to see the children or the mother desired time away from them.

Given couples' typical child care arrangements, mothers were more likely than fathers to feel overwhelmed by child care responsibilities and relieved to have time without the children, although they might be worried about the children when they were in the care of their fathers. Fathers, on the other hand, were more apt to experience visits as too brief and harried, and times spent without the children as desolate.

One father spoke poignantly about his alternating feelings of joy when his children appeared and loss when his children left:

> One of the things I've learned from all this is that I think I need my kids more than they need me. Because kids, believe it or not, they want you when they need you. Other than that they have their own separate lives, even at two and three, four years old. But when they need you, that's when they need you. And that's why I want to be available to them at every opportunity that I possibly can. It is tough on the weekends that I don't have them. There's a lot of times when I say, Oh, I wish they were here to see this or that. And I do miss a lot of seeing them every day and being able to help with their homework or get excited about my daughter trying to learn to play the piano, and things like that. Its like when I pick them up I feel euphoric, when I drop them off it's a letdown, because they're gone. And if they need me, I won't be there. I feel a little empty, a little incomplete, a little lost, because I feel like no one depends on me for anything. And I am the kind of person, I need for someone to depend on me. I need to feel responsible. So I feel less complete at this point.

Part-time parenthood is different from having the children as a normal part of one's life. Each parent continually has the cyclic experience of losing the children and regaining them. Each parent has to adapt to the children being with them sometimes, and away sometimes. When the children are resident in the household, it is a single-parent family, and if the parent works full time, there is the single-parent problem of vulnerability to overload. In addition to the usual work responsibilities, the parent then has to manage the household chores of shopping, cooking, cleaning, and keeping clothes in order, as well as attend to her or his own needs and the children's need for reestablishing a sense of closeness.

Fathers who have their children only on weekends complain that there is not nearly enough time to give the children the kind of attention they want to give them. One father described his experience as an intermittent parent to his three children:

> I pick them up and rush to get dinner prepared. Which is always a challenge, because no one ever likes to eat what you are going to fix, everybody wants something different. And get the food prepared, at the same time trying to answer questions from every kid, because everybody has a question to ask me. And to divide your attention among the three of them becomes a real challenge. At the same time, trying to make sure homework is done. And get them prepared for a bath and ready for the next day. And before you know it, you're looking at 9:30, and you know the kids should be in bed already. And you try to be somewhat flexible, because you have not seen them. You certainly don't want to just pick them up and put them right in bed, because that doesn't serve any kind of purpose for you. And none of us ever gets a chance to sort of . . . sit back and relax and enjoy ourselves.

The demands of single parenting come to a sudden end when the children leave for the other parent's household. Now the parent is entirely free to pursue his or her own concerns. The parent may see a boyfriend or girlfriend, or read, or watch television, or catch up on sleep. Often, though, the parent worries about how the children are doing in the other household.

Parent couples differ in the extent to which the children become inaccessible to one parent when in the other parent's household. If parents live near each other and the children are older and the parental relationship is cordial, children can move easily between households, although even in the best case the children are likely to treat one household as more nearly home than the other. Most of the parents we interviewed lived too far from each other, or had children too young for the children to visit a parent's household as they wished, and a few of the couples tried to discourage the other parent's telephone calls to the children.

Although for some children traveling between the parents' households is a minor price to pay for feeling that both parents remain accessible, most children dislike it. One early adolescent girl who saw her father quite often in the week said that a twenty-minute walk to her father's house was very different from having her father right there.

> When I was doing my homework I had like six pages in every subject and I just started crying. I was like, "Why can't my parents just be back together again so that they can both help me? So I can get both their opinions on math homework and stuff? So I won't have to get a tutor?" Before, they used to always be with me, but now I have to go to the next town in order to see Dad. I mean it's only a twenty-minute walk from my house, but still I like him being here instead of me having to go over to his house. I don't like switching back and forth every day.

The repeated loss and rejoining that goes on between parents and children contributes to problems in maintaining the continuity of parental relationships. It is difficult for parents to keep up with what has happened in their children's lives and it is difficult for children to have ready access to both parents whenever they need them.

Parents find themselves asking their children to report something that happened on the days in which the children were with the other parent. The children in the two-household family do not have the option of saying that they have already told the other parent, so why not ask the other parent. Instead, the children have to repeat their stories. And by the time the children see the second parent, the stories the parent wants to hear no longer hold the same meaning for the children; new events now occupy their minds. A father said:

> My oldest child says, "I get tired of coming home and I got to tell you stuff and then I got to tell Mommy stuff, got to show you papers, got to show Mommy papers. I just want to tell it one time."

For the children, the biggest problem in two-household parenting is that one parent is always absent. Furthermore, the parent, who for the time being is the noncustodial parent, can be hard for the children to reach. Usually, it is the father who isn't there, and often a telephone call will not reach him. The children cannot count on being able to contact their fathers when they want to. A boy said about his father, "Seems like I hardly ever get to talk to him, because when he calls us I'm outside, and when I call him, he's not home."

Some children worry that the parent who for the moment is the noncustodial parent will be unable to reach them. They worry that the noncustodial parent may fall ill or encounter some other emergency. Or that the noncustodial parent will be worried about them, or have something to tell them, or want them back. An early adolescent girl said:

> When I go away on the weekends, I always worry about my mom. I always wonder what happens if something happens? They're not going to know the phone number so I can get contacted. What if I come home and there's something wrong, like she's in the hospital, or something happened? And now I worry about my friends too, and even my brother's friends, because early in the year, my brother's friend died in a boat accident. One night there was a problem with my mother and she had no way of getting in touch with us because we were over there. We were outside my father's apartment and my father wouldn't let me go back up to watch TV because he and my brother were playing catch. And I was extremely bored. And if I had gone upstairs I would have gotten this call from my mother. And she had been trying and trying to call us. She had no idea what was going on.

A few children mentioned as one advantage of two-household parenting that their fathers were more available. No children thought two-household parenting was an improvement over having the parents together in a home they also shared. All children found reason for complaint. In addition to disliking a situation in which they could only be with their parents one at a time, they disliked traveling between the households. There is, to begin with, the small irritations of having to plan for the move, then there is having to pack and having to leave their neighborhoods and friends, and at the end of a visit, fearing that possessions would be left behind when they changed households.

Some children said they didn't adapt well to the alternating bedrooms. A father said:

> One of our biggest concerns about this whole situation is that we recognize that it's tiring packing a kid up and moving him two days a week. You know, just picking them up and spending some time with them, and taking them back.

Going from one parent to the other often meant leaving friends and it sometimes meant being unavailable for parties or sports events. Adolescents, especially, were likely to complain about this. An early adolescent girl said:

> I remember I had a report to do for school and I was assigned to do it with another friend. And we couldn't get together any day in the week. And that weekend I was with my dad. And he said, "Well, you better find a way that you can do it during the week, because I'm not sacrificing my weekend for you for a stupid project." So she had to cancel a music lesson or something so that we could get together on a Thursday, and then I could be with my dad that weekend.

Conclusion

Parenting from separate households entails negotiating agreement on boundaries and their permeability. Parents who are no longer partners have to negotiate the nature of the boundaries of their households, their relationships, and their resources. They have to negotiate accessibility. On the other hand, parents and children assume they have access to one another even when they are not coresidents. An assumption of continuing accessibility between parents and children, regardless of their ages or stages of life, seems to explain why the boundaries of the households of grandparents and grandchildren are relatively permeable and unproblematic. On the other hand, an assumption of a lack of accessibility between ex-spouses appears to account for the relative impermeability of the boundaries between their households and/or the problematic nature of those boundaries.

Among the people we describe in this paper, different perspectives on the permeability of such boundaries correlate with the degree of difficulty in co-parenting from separate households. People who viewed household boundaries as permeable had less difficulty in co-parenting, and people who conceptualized the rights and duties of parental roles as divisible and distributable among different persons had less difficulty in co-parenting. Conversely, people who saw the boundaries of households, roles, and relationships as closed had more difficulty in co-parenting.

The problems associated with parenting from separate households derive from the persistence of cultural ideas about relationships and resources that are more appropriate to the household form in which parents are coresidential. The two-household form of co-parenting requires that those involved in

it establish new understandings or "tiny cultures" (Goldner 1982) consistent with their situation. Among the understandings that have to be developed are those concerning the permeability of household boundaries, the movement of children from household to household, and the particulars of the allocation of resources between the households. Parents will have to establish a shared understanding of the extent to which they will make decisions jointly, the conditions under which one parent can ask help of the other, and the children's events for which the parents will appear together. Differences in the ways in which our informants have accomplished these goals help to explain the variability of their experiences in parenting from separate households. Moreover, the process of forming new understandings suggests that the two-household family form is not inevitably problematic. Rather, what is inevitable are the difficulties entailed in the process of developing new understandings.

Notes

We gratefully acknowledge the help of Susan Clark, Stephanie Howard, and Amy Koel in the recruitment of families for this study, and Stephanie Howard for interviewing the children. All three have contributed significantly to the preparation of this manuscript. We also thank Linda Stone for her editorial suggestions.

References

Abu, Katharine. 1983. The Separateness of Spouses: Conjugal Resources in an Ashanti Town. In *Female and Male in West Africa*, ed. Christine Oppong. Boston: Allen and Unwin.

Bohannan, Paul. 1971. Dyad Dominance and Household Maintenance. In *Kinship and Culture*, ed. Francis Hsu. Chicago: Aldine.

Bray, James H., and Charlene E. Depner. 1993. Perspectives on Nonresidential Parenting. In *Nonresidental Parenting: New Vistas in Family Living*, ed. Charlene E. Depner and James H. Bray. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.

Buchanan, Christy M., Eleanor E. Maccoby, and Sanford Dornbusch. 1996. *Adolescents After Divorce*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Clark, Gracia. 1989. Money, Sex, and Cooking: Manipulation of the Paid/Unpaid Boundary by Ashanti Market Women. In *The Social Economy of Consumption*, ed. Henry Rutz and Benjamin S. Orlove. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America.

Del Carmen, Rebecca, and Gabrielle N. Virgo. 1993. Marital Disruption and Nonresidential Parenting. In *Nonresidental Parenting: New Vistas in Family Living*, ed. Charlene E. Depner and James H. Bray. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.

———. 1993. Nonresidential Parenting: Multidimensional Approaches in Research, Policy, and Practice. In *Nonresidental Parenting: New Vistas in Family Living*, ed. Charlene E. Depner and James H. Bray. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.

Fortes, Meyer. 1949. Time and Social Structure: An Ashanti Case Study. In *Social Structure*, ed. Meyer Fortes. New York: Russell and Russell.

———. 1950. Kinship and Marriage Among the Ashanti. In *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, ed. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryl Forde. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 1969. *Kinship and the Social Order*. Chicago: Aldine.

Goldner, Virginia. 1982. Remarriage Family: Structure, System, Future. In *Therapy with Remarriage Families*, ed. Lillian Messinger. Rockville, Md.: Aspen Systems Corp.

Howard, Stephanie E. 1996. Post-Divorce Influences on Fathering and Their Implications for Children's Well-Being. Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts at Boston.

Maccoby, Eleanor E., and Robert H. Mnookin. 1992. *Dividing the Child: Social and Legal Dilemmas of Custody*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Skolnick, Arlene. 1991. *Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty*. New York: Basic.

Weiss, Robert S. 1994. *Learning From Strangers*. New York: Free Press.