

**YOUNG ADULTS'  
PERSPECTIVES ON DIVORCE  
Living Arrangements**

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There is increasing consensus that the perspectives of children need to be taken into account in decisions made by divorcing parents and the courts and that young adults who have lived through their parents' divorces can be an important source of information about children's perspectives. In this study, the authors assessed the perspectives of 820 college adults from divorced families on the issue of children's living arrangements after divorce. Respondents wanted to have spent more time with their fathers as they were growing up, and the living arrangement they believed was best was living equal time with each parent. The living arrangements they had as children gave them generally little time with their fathers. Respondents reported that their fathers wanted more time with them but that their mothers generally did not want them to spend more time with their fathers.

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The purpose of this study is to examine the outcomes of divorce from the perspective of young adults who grew up with their parents' divorces. Important consequences of their parents' divorces for these young adults include the perceptions, attributions, attitudes, and feelings they are left with as they begin the process of starting their own adult lives and families. There is increasing consensus (L'Heureux-Dube, 1998; Mason, 1999; Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998) that the perspectives of children need to be taken into account in decisions made by divorcing parents and the courts and that young adults who have lived through their parents' divorces can be an important source of information about children's perspectives. But divorce researchers have typically not queried young adults about their parents' divorces.

One important aspect of the lives of children of divorce involves the living arrangements they have with each of their parents. Decisions about living arrangements are usually made early in the separation and divorce process and tend to be perpetuated throughout children's divorced family life. In most cases, these decisions are made for them. Because these arrangements set the context for their daily lives, children of divorce are likely to form strong perspectives on the issue of living arrangements.

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Earlier research on younger children's perspectives on living arrangements has demonstrated that children desire free and frequent access to noncustodial parents. For example, Rosen (1979) found that 60% of children wanted unrestricted contact, regardless of whether the noncustodial parent was mother or father. Children repeatedly insisted that being able to see the noncustodial parents whenever they wished and being able to see that parent often made their parents' divorces tolerable for them.

Kelly and Wallerstein (1977) reported that young children viewed the typical every-other-weekend visitation arrangement as severely inadequate. "The only younger children reasonably content with the visiting situation were those 7- and 8-year-olds visiting 2 or 3 times a week, most often by pedaling to their father's apartment on a bicycle" (p. 52). They also report that older children also wanted easy access and frequent contact. These children's feelings appeared to have some external validation in that "there were surprisingly few instances where we considered frequent visits to be detrimental to a child, or where such frequent visiting placed that child substantially at risk" (p. 54).

The perspectives of young children, although compelling, have not had much influence in public policy debates about custody and visitation. Young children's feelings may be suspected of being relatively temporary, malleable, and ultimately not strongly connected to measurable outcomes. The public policy debate about custody and visitation has generally been framed in terms of parents' (and, most recently, grandparents') rights rather than children's wishes (Mason, 1999). Thus, it is important that Wallerstein and Lewis (1998) have recently reported on the longitudinal follow-up of the perspectives of these children now that they are adults. Their report is based on a subsample of 25 respondents who were the youngest (now ages 27 to 32) in the longitudinal study.

Wallerstein and Lewis (1998) found that many of their respondents reported that their visitation schedules with their fathers had been too disruptive and too inflexible and that when this was true they got little enjoyment or benefit from visitation in the way of enhanced relationships with their fathers. As adults, they feel strongly now, as they did then, that their wishes should have been taken into account, and they remain angry and resentful that they were not. On the basis of the current perspectives of these adult children of divorce, Wallerstein and Lewis argue that the child's voice is too often not heard in decisions about living arrangements and visitation schedules.

It is clear from Wallerstein and Lewis's report that their respondents wished for more flexibility in scheduling of visits, but it is unclear if on balance they wished for more or less amounts of time with their fathers. The issue of flexibility of scheduling of visits is separate from the issue of amount of time spent with father, but it is reasonable to assume that these adults

wanted to have had their voices heard regarding both. Among the best adjusted of these respondents at 7 and 8 years of age were those who could ride their bikes to their fathers' houses, effecting some control over both the scheduling and the amount of time with their fathers. If we are able to take the child's wishes into account regarding visitation, then a crucial missing piece of information is the quantity of time they now wish that they had had with their fathers.

We have undertaken a systematic examination of this issue with a large sample of young adults who, like Wallerstein and Lewis's respondents, are looking back and evaluating their childhood experiences in divorced families. First, we examine their reports of what living arrangements they had and how those arrangements changed as time passed. Second, we examine what living arrangements they wanted and what arrangements they feel their mothers and fathers wanted. Third, we examine in some detail what living arrangement this next generation of parents believes is best.

It is important to determine what living arrangements young adults remember having. There have typically been reports that most divorced fathers do not see their children much (Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991, Table C). However, this research has been done almost exclusively with mothers. When asked, fathers report more involvement, both on subjective scales (Ahrns, 1983; Fulton, 1979) and objective scales (Braver et al., 1993). Part of the difference may be due to different interpretations by mothers and fathers of what constitutes father involvement (Ahrns, 1983). Children's interpretations of how much involvement they had with their fathers are important because these interpretations form the children's subjective assessments of the disparity between what they had and what they wanted.

Young adults will have some understanding of the living arrangements each of their parents wanted, based not only on what their parents said but also on their actions while they were growing up. These perceptions of what their parents wanted are important because they are part of the young adults' understanding of how and why their parents made the living-arrangement decisions that they did. These perceptions are also a potential source of feelings of rejection or resentment if the young adults perceive that a parent wanted little involvement or that one parent wanted the other parent to have little involvement with them.

There may be an advantage to asking young adults what their parents wanted because it may avoid a self-serving bias that could influence parents' reports. There have been reports that mothers want father involvement (Furstenberg, 1988). We know much less about what fathers want (Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994). Statistics showing that divorced fathers spend little time

with their children do not tell us that this is necessarily what the fathers want. Some fathers may want little time, but others may have wanted to take equal responsibility for child rearing but were prevented by circumstances from doing so. Thus, young adults' perceptions of the living arrangements their parents wanted will provide some needed third party the information on what kinds of living arrangements divorced mothers and fathers want.

A final part of their perspectives is their belief about what living arrangement is best for children. This belief will be personally relevant to them in at least two ways. They will evaluate the living arrangements they had in light of what they believe is best for children, and what they believe is best will influence future decisions they may have to make for their own children. They may think that what they think is best is similar to what divorced mothers think, or divorced fathers, or neither. To the extent they see their own beliefs as different, and their parents' generation's beliefs as wrong, they may be likely to hold their own beliefs more strongly. Consequently, we also examined what they thought divorced mothers and divorced fathers would believe are the best living arrangements for children.

Derevensky and Deschamps (1997) have recently examined some of these issues and concluded that most young adults from divorced families do not see joint physical custody as a viable option; however, their conclusion may be premature. They studied a very small sample ( $N = 37$ ) of college students from divorced families, and the only question they asked about their preferred living arrangements was whether they would have wanted joint physical custody or sole physical custody with one or the other parent. Most students had sole maternal custody, and 83% of them preferred it. However, circumstances such as their parents living in different school districts might have prevented students from wanting to split their time equally between their parents' houses, although they still might have wanted more time with their fathers. Derevensky and Deschamps did not ask how much time they would have preferred with their fathers, nor did they ask what living arrangement they felt was best for children in general. They did find, however, that of those students who actually had joint custody, 80% preferred having it.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were students in an introductory psychology course at a large southwestern state university who took part in research for course credit dur-

ing the fall 1996, fall 1997, spring 1998, fall 1998, and spring 1999 semesters. During this time, 344 male participants and 485 female participants indicated they were from divorced families. These participants constituted the sample for this study.

Across all five semesters, 30.7% of the students reported that their parents were divorced. This is comparable to the typical estimate that one third of children's parents will divorce (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; National Center for Health Statistics, 1990, Table 1-31). Women (31.3%) were not significantly more likely to be from divorced families than men (29.9%).<sup>1</sup> Self-reported ethnicity among these participants included Caucasian (77.0%), Hispanic (8.5%), Asian (3.2%), African American (3.2%), Native American (1.4%), Middle Eastern (0.4%) and other (6.4%) (including any two or three categories and none of the above). Mean age at time of testing was 20 years, 1.5 months.

In spring 1999, we asked participants ( $n = 321$ ) when their parents' divorces occurred. Participants were given six response options (1979 or before, 1980-1983, 1984-1987, 1988-1991, 1992-1995, 1996 or later). The respective frequencies for these year-of-divorce intervals were 11%, 29%, 21%, 22%, 12%, and 6%. Thus, for our sample as a whole, the estimated average years of the divorces were from 1985 to 1987.

Participants were given five response options to indicate how old they were when their parents divorced (0-5 years old, 6-10, 11-15, 16-18, 19 or older). The respective frequencies for these age-at-divorce intervals were 38%, 28%, 20%, 10%, and 4%. The estimated age of our participants from these age-at-divorce intervals was 8 years. Braver's (1998) representative sample of divorces filed in 1986 in Phoenix yielded children at approximately 6 years of age.

### Procedures

Students who were present in class were given one of four randomly distributed paper-and-pencil questionnaires during a class period each semester devoted to research participation. Each semester, either some or most of the questions analyzed here were included on one or all of the questionnaires.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means by gender for the living arrangements participants reported they had, the arrangements they wanted, their perceptions of

Table 1  
*Means and Number of Respondents for Reports of Respondents' Living Arrangements*

Living Arrangement	Men		Women	
	Mean	Number	Mean	Number
What they had	2.32	339	1.98	481
What they wanted	3.13	135	2.62	180
What their mothers wanted	2.01	140	1.86	214
What their fathers wanted	3.06	144	3.39	210
Their beliefs about what is best	3.58	341	3.54	478
Divorced mothers' beliefs	2.10	82	1.65	114
Divorced fathers' beliefs	4.40	82	4.43	114

NOTE: The scale ranged from 0 = primary residence with mother and minimal or no contact with father to 8 = primary residence with father and minimal or no contact with mother, with 4 = equal time spent with each parent.

what their parents wanted, their own beliefs about what living arrangement is best, and the living arrangements they think divorced mothers and fathers believe are best for children. For each variable, the scale ranged from 0, indicating primary residence with mother and little contact with father, to 8, indicating primary residence with father and little contact with mother, with 4 indicating equal time spent with each parent.

Men reported a significantly greater amount of time spent with their fathers (mean = 2.32) than women did (1.98).<sup>2</sup> Men also reported that they wanted significantly greater amounts of time with their fathers (3.13) than women did (2.62).<sup>3</sup> Importantly, both men and women wanted significantly more time with their fathers than they actually had.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses to these two questions, collapsed over gender. Eighty percent of participants reported that they had lived primarily with their mothers, 8% reported having lived equal amounts of time with each parent, and 12% reported that they had lived primarily with their fathers. Whereas almost half (48%) reported actual living arrangements in one of the two lowest categories of seeing their fathers, either minimally or not at all, or only some of the time, in a dramatic reversal, 48% reported that they had wanted one of the two categories of seeing their fathers a lot or living equal amounts of time with each parent.

To see how living arrangements and visitation frequency might have changed over time, we asked participants ( $n = 134$ ) to report the arrangements they had during the first 2 years after the divorce (mean for men and women combined = 2.27), the 3rd and 4th years (2.20), the 5th and 6th years

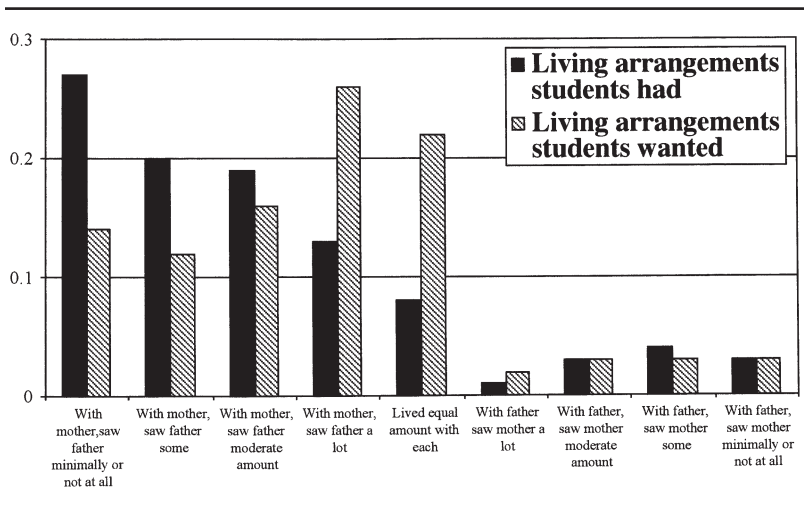


Figure 1. Proportion of subjects who reported they had each type of living arrangement and proportion who reported they wanted each type.

(2.05), and the 7th and 8th years (2.14). Statistical analyses showed no indication that contact with the father decreased during the 8 years following the divorce.

We asked participants which living arrangements they perceived their mothers had wanted and which they perceived their fathers had wanted.<sup>4</sup> Both male and female participants alike reported a significant difference between how much time their fathers wanted with them (mean for men and women combined = 3.25) and how much time their mothers wanted their fathers to have (1.92). Figure 2 shows the distributions of responses to these two questions. Forty percent reported that their mothers had wanted them to see their fathers either minimally or not at all, or only some of the time. Only 7% felt their mothers had wanted them to spend equal amounts of time with each parent. Many fewer fathers than mothers were perceived to have wanted the three lowest categories of father involvement, whereas 44% of participants reported that their fathers had wanted their children to live with them either half time or more than half time.

There was no significant difference between the actual living arrangements participants reported they had and what they reported their mothers wanted them to have, for either men or women. Fathers, however, were perceived by both male and female participants to have wanted significantly more involvement than they had. This was especially true of those fathers who saw their children minimally or not at all, some, and a moderate amount.

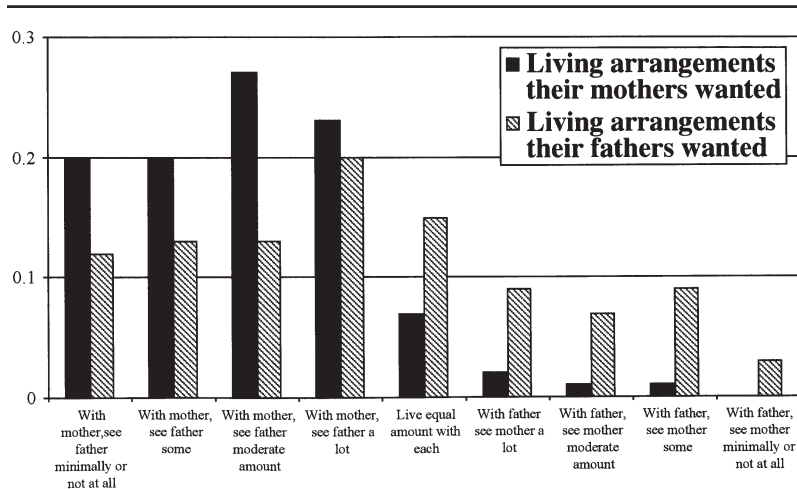


Figure 2. Proportion of subjects who reported their mothers and fathers wanted each type of living arrangement.

The percentages of these fathers who were perceived to have wanted more involvement than they had were 63%, 78%, and 78%, respectively. In contrast, the percentages of mothers who were perceived to have wanted their children to have more contact with their fathers decreased rapidly once fathers had a moderate amount of contact. The corresponding percentages of mothers were 60%, 55%, and 28%. Overall, only 32% of participants reported that their mothers and fathers had wanted the same living arrangements.

Finally, men felt that their fathers wanted the same amount of time with them (mean = 3.06) as they themselves wanted (3.13), but women felt that their fathers wanted significantly more time with them (3.39) than they wanted (2.62) (see Table 1).

We next wanted to see what our participants, who had lived through their parents' divorces, thought was the best living arrangement for children of divorce.<sup>5</sup> In asking this question, we used more socially acceptable anchor categories of regular visits with the other parent, instead of anchoring the scale with categories of seeing the other parent minimally or not at all. These were followed by three categories specifying increasing numbers of overnight stays (a few, some, and a substantial number). As before, the central category (4 on the scale) specified living equal amounts of time with each parent. There was no significant difference between men (mean = 3.58) and women (3.54) on this question. Figure 3 shows that 70% of the participants felt that



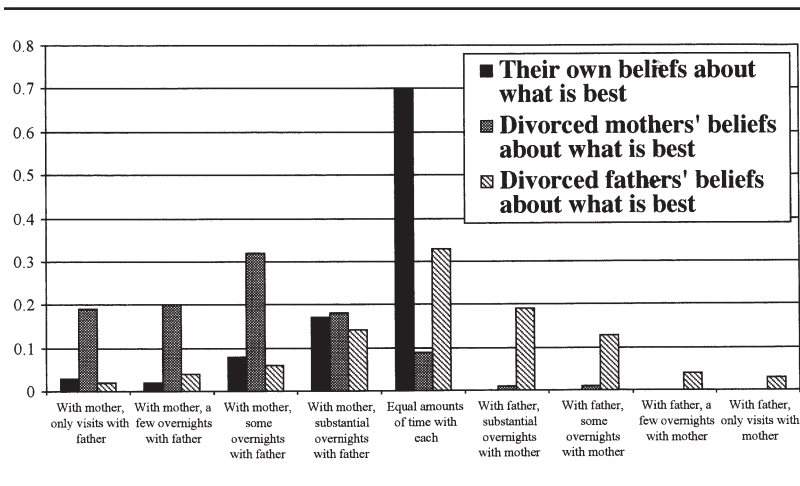


Figure 3. Proportion of subjects who believed each type of living arrangement was best for children, and proportion who thought divorced mothers and divorced fathers would believe each type was best.

the best living arrangement for children was equal amounts of time with each parent.

We checked to see if the strong preference for equal living arrangements was not perhaps coming from those participants who had lived less with their fathers. Perhaps believing that an equal living arrangement is ideal is a “grass is greener” phenomenon, and those who had in fact lived more equally with both parents might perceive this arrangement as less than ideal. However, of those who lived equal time with each parent, 93% believed that an equal living arrangement was in fact best.

We asked participants ( $n = 88$ ) what they thought was the best living arrangement for children of different ages (stipulating that the parents were both good parents and they lived relatively close to one another). There were five versions of this question that asked about children ages birth to 2 years, 3 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, 11 to 14 years, and 15 to 18 years. The question asked, “How many days should the child spend at the Dad’s house during an average 2-week (14-day) period where ‘day’ means daytime plus overnight?” The response scale differed from the qualitative scale used in the previous question, because it provided quantitative categories. It was worded as follows: “0 = 1-2 days at dad’s (this is equivalent to one weekend at most with dad); 1 = 3-4 days at dad’s; 2 = 5 days at dad’s; 3 = 6 days at dad’s; 4 = 7 days at dad’s (equal time with each); 5 = 8 days at dad’s; 6 = 9 days at dad’s; 7 = 10-11

days at dad's; 8 = 12-13 days at dad's (this is equivalent to one weekend at most with mom)."

The means for the five age intervals were 1.98, 2.78, 2.99, 3.01, and 2.91, respectively. The mean for birth to 2 years was significantly lower than the means for the older ages, which did not differ among each other. The quantitative response options used in these questions reveal that participants felt that, in a 2-week period, even infants and toddlers should spend 5 days and nights at their fathers' houses (1.98). For older children, age 3 to 18, participants felt they should spend on average six days and nights (2.92). In this question, the category of equal time was defined narrowly as 7 days and nights out of 14. The percentages of respondents who chose either 6 days or 7 days for each age interval were 32%, 52%, 64%, 61%, and 57%, respectively.

Finally, we wondered if participants felt that their views on the best living arrangements for children were similar to the views held by their parents' generation.<sup>6</sup> The response scale was the qualitative one, anchored by the categories of regular visits with the other parent. Even though the questions specified conditions (i.e., two good parents living nearby) that should have been conducive to shared living arrangements, there was a significant difference between what they thought divorced fathers would think was best and what divorced mothers would think was best. They felt that fathers on average would think the best arrangement for children is to live with their fathers somewhat more than half the time (mean for men and women combined = 4.42), and that mothers would think that only some overnights with father was best (1.88). Figure 3 also shows the distribution of responses to these two questions. Importantly, participants felt that their own beliefs about what is best were significantly different from those of divorced mothers, in that they felt few mothers would think equal time was best, and also from those of divorced fathers, in that they felt many fathers would think primary residence with the father was best.

## DISCUSSION

Wallerstein and Lewis (1998) argue that children's voices too often are not heard in decisions that affect them during divorce, leading to resentment, anger, and damage to parent-child relationships that persist into adulthood. In this study, we asked more than 800 young adults who had grown up with their parents' divorces to give us their perspectives on a central issue that affects children of divorce daily: their living arrangements with each of their parents. Their perspective was clear. They wanted to have spent more time with their

fathers as they were growing up, and the living arrangement they believed was best for children was living equal time with each parent.

The two categories of living arrangements that participants most wanted to have were to live equal amounts of time with each parent and, one step below that, to see their fathers a lot. These desires for more time with their fathers stemmed from a childhood in which they spent generally little time with them and in which they perceived substantial disagreement between their parents on the issue. Participants reported uniformly low levels of amount of time spent with their fathers. Their living arrangements were notable for their lack of variation. The most common arrangement was the lowest category of father involvement (see father minimally or not at all) on the scale, and the range hardly extended beyond half of the scale. The living arrangements were also notable for their stability over time. What participants reported they had at the beginning of their parents' divorces was the same as what they had up to 8 years later. This seems to support Wallerstein and Lewis's (1998) report that parents were not flexible in adjusting living arrangements as children grew older.

Participants perceived that their parents disagreed on the living arrangements they each wanted. It might have been expected that because father involvement was so low that is what fathers wanted, whereas mothers wanted fathers to be more involved. But the opposite was true. Participants reported that their mothers wanted the status quo and it was fathers who wanted more time with their children. Many more mothers than fathers were perceived to have wanted the three lowest categories of father involvement. The preferences participants perceived in their fathers represented quite a high level of desired parental responsibility. Forty-four percent of fathers were perceived by their now-grown children to have wanted their children to live with them either half time or most of the time. They thus believed that close to half of their fathers wanted to have assumed a significant, and more often a majority, of their daily care responsibilities. Even among the participants who saw their fathers minimally or not at all, some of the time, and a moderate amount, 63%, 78%, and 78%, respectively, reported that their fathers had wanted to see them more. It is worth remembering that these were not childhood reports obtained during early stages of fantasy-laden attempts to cope with father absence but reports of adult college students who had, in Wallerstein and Lewis's (1998) words, "formulated and reformulated their judgments on each parent on the basis of their own observations throughout their growing-up years" (p. 377). Given that mothers wanted the status quo and fathers wanted more involvement, it is not surprising that only 32% reported that their mothers and fathers had wanted the same living arrangements.

Participants believed that the best living arrangement for children was equal time with each parent. This represented a remarkable consensus on their part and a remarkable divergence from their experiences in their own families. Fewer than 10% grew up in the category of living equal amounts of time with each parent. They also felt that fewer than 10% of their mothers and 20% of their fathers wanted equal time, and just over 20% of participants themselves wanted equal time given their particular family circumstances. But 70% of them, men and women alike, thought that living equal amounts of time with each parent was the best living arrangement for children. Among the few of them that actually had that arrangement, an even greater percentage (93%) believed it was best. This belief of theirs also represented a remarkable divergence from what they thought their parents' generation would believe is best. Participants saw themselves as holding a new belief about which living arrangement is in the best interests of the child. Male participants saw themselves as different from divorced fathers on the issue, and female participants especially saw themselves as different from divorced mothers (see Table 1). From their points of view, neither divorced mothers, whom they perceived to want much less father involvement, nor divorced fathers, many of whom they perceived to want their children to live with them more than half time, got it right.

Thus, participants' belief that children should live equal amounts of time with each parent was not simply a reflection of their perceptions of anyone else's views. Clearly, this was their own decision, and it proved difficult to shake. It remained unchanged through changes in the wording of the question and changes in the position of the question in the surveys. And it remained remarkably consistent through changes in the response scale that introduced quantitative responses and distinctions among different-age children. The majority of participants felt that in a 2-week period the best arrangement should be either 6 or 7 days and nights at the father's house for each age interval beyond infancy and toddlerhood.

Research on the correlates of divorce has shown that parental conflict is associated with negative outcomes for children (e.g., Emery, 1982; Peterson & Zill, 1986). The present data show that the potential exists for children to be exposed to parental conflict on the issue of children's living arrangements. Children apparently expect that it is the norm for divorced mothers and fathers to disagree quite strongly on living arrangements (see Figure 3). And children apparently easily notice if their fathers do want more time, because 57% of our participants reported their fathers wanted more time. Thus, children are likely to expect and know about parental disagreement over living arrangements. The current situation in which both fathers and children gener-

ally want more time together than they have thus creates a dilemma. If fathers try to reassure their children that they would like to have more time with them, they run the risk of making the child feel caught in the middle. If fathers try to hide it, they run the risk of their children thinking they do not share their desire for more time together.

The way out of this dilemma is to somehow promote more parental agreement on the issue of living arrangements. The primary consideration should be children's wishes, as Mason (1999) and Wallerstein and Lewis (1998) have recently and forcefully argued. For too long, however, we have had little insight into what living arrangements children actually want and which ones make the pain of their parents' separations easier to bear, and parents and policy makers alike have paid too little heed to what insight we did have (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977; Rosen, 1979). Our participants, who have lived through their parents' divorces and have now entered young adulthood (and college), have given us their "expert" advice. Seventy percent of them, men and women alike, believe that living equal amounts of time with each parent is the best arrangement for children. Our participants felt that a substantial portion of their fathers wanted to be primary caregivers (see Figure 2), which was clearly not in agreement with participants' beliefs about what is best, whereas other fathers wanted less than equal involvement. Therefore, change for fathers will apparently have to come in both directions. But among mothers, virtually all were perceived to have wanted less father involvement than equal time, so change for mothers will be in the direction of approving of much more father involvement. What should motivate both mothers and fathers is the knowledge that if they do not change, their children will grow up feeling that their parents did not give them the living arrangement that they consider to be best for children. What should make change easier is the fact that what children want are more equitable living arrangements, and so parents ideally do not have to see the issue as a win or lose situation for themselves.

In society and the courts, the discussion is still circumscribed by assumptions and concerns about reasonable visitation within the context of primary residence with the mother. This assumption is at odds with what the current generation of college students believes is best. And the resulting living-arrangement decisions that were made for this generation were at odds with the amount of time they wanted to spend with their fathers. But if the attitudes expressed by our participants do not change as they grow older, then the custody wars that they experienced as children will become a thing of the past in the next generation. The future mothers and fathers among our participants agreed on the best living arrangement for children after divorce. We suspect that their attitudes are not likely to change for several reasons. They

see themselves as taking a new position on living arrangements, different from both mothers and fathers in their parents' generation. Having arrived at that position on their own, they may be less likely to give it up. And they are not likely to forget the experiences and feelings they had as children of divorce that led them to their belief that equal living arrangements are best for children.

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The plea has recently been made (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998; Mason 1999) and apparently is being heard by the courts (L'Heureux-Dube, 1998) to develop a child-centered approach to custody and visitation decisions. The current findings can be used by those setting policy and those deciding individual cases to understand the typical feelings that children undergoing their parents' divorces will have regarding their living arrangements. Young adults who have lived through their parents' divorces, and who have gone on to college, do not think living equal time with each parent is necessarily unworkable, and in fact, they believe with remarkable consensus that it is the best arrangement for children. Application to individual cases must of course be based on assessments of individual children and their particular circumstances, which may or may not make equal living arrangements appropriate. But it is the parents who ultimately must decide to make these arrangements workable. Perhaps the best use of these findings is for professionals to share them with parents, to make parents aware of the lasting feelings their children are likely to have about the living arrangements they will give them. Future research does need to determine how well these findings hold for students who do not go to college. Thus, the most conservative application of the current findings for now is to families who are likely to send their children to college. But the remarkable consensus shown by our participants does suggest that the belief that equal living arrangements is best cuts across many different family circumstances and childhood experiences. Our participants did not seem to represent families that were particularly predisposed to encourage children to believe that equal living arrangements were viable and optimal. Children generally had little time with their fathers, mothers tended to want that level of father involvement, and fathers ranged across the scale in terms of how much involvement they wanted. The current results show that for a large section of the population at least, children want more time with their fathers after divorce and they perceive that their fathers do also. Viewed in just one simplistic way, the discrepancy between the amount of parental responsibility perceived to be desired by their fathers and the amount they

actually provided represents a significant and untapped source of child care. Viewed in a deeper way, in terms of human relationships, it represents a lost opportunity on the part of both father and child and a potential source of regret and resentment in ongoing relationships.

### NOTES

1. Throughout this article, when we refer to differences being significant, we mean statistically significant at the conventional level of probability, that is, that there is less than a 5% probability that the difference would not be found again in a different study on another set of participants. Details of the statistical tests are available on request.

2. This question read, "Between the time your parents got divorced and now, which of the following best characterizes your living arrangements with each of them?"

3. This question read, "What living arrangement do you feel most closely describes what you wanted to have after the divorce?"

4. These questions read, "What living arrangement do you feel most closely describes what [your mother or your father] wanted you to have after the divorce?"

5. The first version (fall 1996) of this question began as follows: "If two parents get divorced, and they are equally good parents and live relatively close to one another . . ." We suspected that the term "equally good" might have tended to elicit responses of "equal time with each parent." Consequently, we revised the question in the next three administrations of the survey to replace the term "equally good parents" with "both good parents." The change had no effect. The mean before the change was 3.58 ( $n = 147$ ), and after the change the overall mean was 3.57 ( $n = 359$ ; fall 1997 = 3.65, spring 1998 = 3.59, fall 1998 = 3.40). Finally, we changed the wording again for the last administration to remove the phrase "and they are both good parents and they live relatively close to one another" so that participants would not base their answers only on children who had optimal circumstances for equal time. The question simply asked, "If two parents get divorced, what do you feel is the best living arrangement for the children?" The mean remained the same at 3.58 ( $n = 321$ ). The position of the question was also varied within the divorce section of the surveys. In the first two administrations, it appeared after the same 10 questions about actual living arrangements and relationships with parents; in the final three administrations, it appeared as the first question.

6. These questions read, "We want to know what you think divorced moms [divorced dads] would say to the question: If two parents get divorced, and they are both good parents, and they live relatively close to one another, what do you feel is the best living arrangement for the child(ren)?"

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