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**DAUGHTERS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH  
NONRESIDENTIAL FATHERS:  
AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
of the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology,  
The University of Auckland, March, 2011**

## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative thesis study investigates daughters' experiences of relationships with nonresidential fathers following parental separation, the supportive and difficult aspects of these relationships, and daughters' perceptions of the impact of the relationship on themselves and their sense of wellbeing. The study also investigates experiences external to relationships with fathers that impact on this relationship, including other relationships within the separated family. The study includes two projects, a questionnaire study and an interview study. The questionnaire study was designed to collect information about daughters' experiences of relationships post-separation. Fifty-five young adult women, who had parents that had separated during their childhood or adolescence, completed the questionnaire. Sixteen of these participants also took part in the second project, the interview study. The interviews gathered in-depth data about the participants' relationships with their fathers pre- and post-separation, including current relationships. Thematic analyses were conducted on the data from the two projects. Most participants described both supportive and unsupportive aspects of relationships with nonresidential fathers in the years following parental separation. A common experience that emerged across both studies was a sense of loss that occurred within the father-daughter relationship. This included a loss of contact and for some, a perceived loss of fathers' interest and involvement in their lives. Some experienced difficulties in communicating with fathers, or superficiality in the relationship. Some daughters attributed distance in relationships with fathers to the father's personal problems, while others attributed the distance to changes in the fathers' lifestyle and loss of interest in daughters. Subsequently, some participants described feelings of rejection and resentment towards fathers. On the other hand, some participants were positive about fathers who were perceived to remain actively involved in their lives, demonstrating interest and affection to them.

Participants also identified contextual factors that supported or created barriers to relationships with nonresidential fathers. These concerned practical considerations, including geographical proximity, fathers' work commitments, and living arrangements. For some participants, the quality of relationships between separated parents also appeared to impact relationships with fathers. This included ongoing inter-parental conflict and the impact of visitation arrangements. Fathers' repartnering also appeared to impact some participants' relationships with fathers, either positively or negatively. Finally, some participants perceived

that mothers had affected their relationships with fathers, such that mothers' support could enhance the nonresidential father-daughter relationship, and mothers' difficulties with the nonresidential father could impact negatively on the daughters' feelings towards fathers or feelings about spending time with them. The implications of the results for separating families are discussed along with future research directions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I entered this research with my own experience of parental separation. My parents separated when I was 14 years old. I have always been interested in the impact of the father-daughter relationship on daughters' wellbeing. So when I was offered the opportunity to carry out research in the area of post-separation families, it seemed a natural fit.

Completing the doctorate programme would not have been possible without the invaluable support I have received from my supervisor, family and friends in the programme.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>x</b>
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Terminology	2
Theoretical Perspective	2
Literature Review	4
Divorce rates and trends	4
The impact of parental separation on children	5
Factors impacting on child adjustment	6
Interaction of factors	10
Parenting after separation	10
Effect of parental mental health issues on children’s relationships with nonresidential fathers	11
Coparenting styles	12
Parental repartnering and stepfamily living	14
Challenges of new stepfamilies	15
Father repartnering and nonresidential father-child relationships	16
Mother repartnering and nonresidential father-child relationships	18
Relationships between fathers and children following separation	19
Fathers’ experience of post-separation parenting	21
Child and young adults’ experiences of relationships with nonresidential fathers	23
The father daughter relationship	26
Daughters’ relationships with nonresidential fathers	28
<b>CHAPTER TWO: OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>31</b>
Qualitative Methodology	31
Authenticity and Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research Methodology	32

Personal and epistemological reflexivity	33
Personal reflection	33
The epistemological framework of this study	34
Meticulousness of methodology contributing to quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research	35
Thematic Analysis	35
Process of thematic analysis	39
Content/Categorical Analysis	39
<b>CHAPTER THREE: QUESTIONNAIRE PROJECT.....</b>	<b>40</b>
Introduction	40
Method	40
Ethics	40
Participants	40
Design of the questionnaire	41
Procedure	41
Data Analysis	41
Results	43
Content analyses	43
Separation and custodial arrangements	43
Reason for parents' separation	43
Preferred custody and visitation arrangements	44
Father-daughter contact two years following parental separation	45
Thematic analysis	46
Daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers	46
Current/adult relationships with fathers	57
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEW PROJECT.....</b>	<b>62</b>
Introduction	62
Method	62
Ethics	62
Participants	62



Data collection – interviews	63
Data analysis	64
Results	65
Relationships with fathers prior to the separation	65
Distant or uninvolved relationships	65
Close supportive relationships	66
Relationships with nonresidential fathers during childhood and adolescence	67
Supportive experiences	68
Unsupportive experiences	71
Current relationships with fathers	78
Supportive experiences	79
Unsupportive experiences	81
Fathers influence on daughters’ wellbeing and functioning	84
Sense of self-concept	84
Experience of relationships	86
Advice to Fathers	88
Being involved	89
Civil relationship with other parent	90
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>92</b>
Father-Daughter Relationship	92
Father’s parenting approach	92
Impact of relationship on daughters’ current self concept and relationships	95
Mother-Daughter Relationship	96
Co-parental Relationship	96
Parental Repartnering and Stepfamily Living	97
Impact of stepmothers on nonresidential father-daughter relationship	97
Limitations	99
Implications for Future Research	100
Implications for Clinical Practice	101
Conclusions	103

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Childhood and adolescent themes .....	47
Table 2: Supportive and unsupportive experiences .....	67
Table 3: Supportive and unsupportive aspects of current relationships with fathers .....	79

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Daughters' Relationships with Nonresidential Fathers Following Parental Separation Questionnaire.....	128
Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet .....	138
Appendix C: Participant Consent Form .....	140
Appendix D: Interview Guide .....	141
Appendix E: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement .....	144

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

This thesis study is an exploratory investigation of daughters' experiences of relationships with nonresidential fathers following parental separation. Research suggests that nonresidential fathers' relationships with children can deteriorate following parental separation. There is also some evidence that fathers' relationships with sons and daughters differ. Hence this study focuses on daughters' experiences.

The overarching aim of this thesis study is to investigate daughters' experiences of relationships with their nonresidential fathers following parental separation and their perceptions of the impact of this relationship on their wellbeing. The second aim of this study was to investigate the supportive and difficult aspects of relationships with fathers, especially fathers approaches to parenting. Third, this study also aimed to investigate experiences external to the relationship with fathers that impact on the relationship, including other relationships within the separated family. Finally, this study aims to contribute to the implications for clinical practice in working with separating families.

This thesis study consists of two projects. The first is a questionnaire project completed by 55 participants. The second is an interview project conducted with 16 participants who took part in the first project. Both projects investigate daughters' experiences and views of their relationships with fathers following parental separation. Young adult daughters are included in this study based on the assumption that they are young enough to recollect and verbalise their experiences during childhood and adolescence, while also providing an independent and more mature perspective of these experiences (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002).

This chapter presents an analysis of the recent literature that provides the background to this study. In Chapter Two, the qualitative approach of the study including the methods used, are presented. Chapter Three presents the questionnaire project and Chapter Four presents the interview project. Finally, Chapter Five is a discussion of the results of two projects and suggests directions for future research and implications of this study for clinical practice in working with separated families.

In this chapter I will first address the terminology used in this study as well as the theoretical perspectives guiding the study. Second, I will review the literature as it pertains to the impact of parental separation on children and parents, with particular emphasis on parenting after separation and nonresidential fathers' relationships with children. Finally, I will review the

literature focussing on father-daughter relationships, and provide a rationale for the current study.

## **Terminology**

In response to the 'Care of Children Act' of 2004 (Ministry of Justice, 2005a) there have been changes throughout New Zealand in the legal language to introduce more child empowering language. Legal terms such as 'custody' have been replaced by 'day to day care', and 'access' has been replaced by 'contact'. Furthermore, custody and access orders are now referred to as 'parenting orders' (Ministry of Justice, 2005a). This newer terminology is utilised in this thesis, however, with participants reporting retrospectively, terminology prior to the new legislation is used in the questionnaire and interview projects.

Other terms used throughout this thesis include parental separation, cohabitation, divorce, non-divorced families, shared care, residential parent and nonresidential parent. In the context of this study, *parental separation* refers to the process whereby parents who were previously involved in an intimate relationship, either married or cohabiting, end the relationship and live separately. The term *cohabitation*, refers to parents who are living together but are not married. *Divorce* refers to the legal termination of a marriage, occurring sometimes years after the initial separation, although not used in New Zealand legislation since the 1980's, this is a term widely used in international literature. *Non-divorced families* refers to families where parents are still in an intimate relationship and living together either through marriage or cohabitation.

For the purpose of this thesis study, *shared care* refers to the circumstance whereby children reside over 30 percent in each of their parents' households. The *residential parent* refers to the parent with who the child predominantly resides (70 percent or more of the time), and the *nonresidential parent* refers to the parent who predominantly resides in a separate household from the child, with visits (daily and overnight) occurring up to 30 percent of the time.

## **Theoretical Perspective**

Family systems theory provides a useful framework to guide research into family relationships, family functioning, and parenting approaches that are adaptive or functional in families. Central to the premise of the family systems perspective is the concept that families are networks of interconnected and interdependent relationships, with individuals perceived as part of the larger system (Minuchin, 1974). Interactions are perceived as circular in nature,

contributing to a pattern of family functioning (Carr, 2000; Polacek, 2005). Families with children are organised into subsystems often defined by generation, gender, function, or interest (Minuchin, 1974; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). Three key subsystems have been identified in families with children that include the marital subsystem (husband-wife), the parental subsystem (mother-child relationships; father-child relationships), and the sibling subsystem (Fine & Kurdek, 1995). Each subsystem is regulated by boundaries and defines the particular roles of individuals within the family (Minuchin, 1974). These roles within the family may be clearly defined such as parent and child, or more subtly defined according to personality characteristics of individuals, such as those perceived as ‘responsible’, ‘emotional’, ‘vulnerable’, or ‘reckless’.

Boundaries refer to stable and often unstated rules of how the family operates, regulating relationship interaction, in particular the amount and quality of information shared between subsystems (Madden-Derdich, Leonard & Christopher, 1999). Boundaries are ideally clear and semi-permeable allowing appropriate information and energy to flow freely between subsystems while ensuring the family survive as a coherent system, restricting inappropriate information exchange between subsystems (Carr, 2000; Minuchin, 1974). In the extreme, diffuse or rigid boundaries have been associated with problematic interactions in families. Diffuse boundaries, for example, may result in children’s excessive exposure to adult emotional issues and responsibilities in the case of parentification, and rigid boundaries can result in coalition in the parent-child subsystem that leads to the exclusion of the other parent, or a coalition in the marital subsystem that contributes to the exclusion of the children (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001).

Parental separation leads to the renegotiation of the roles and relationships previously existing within the family. Parents are faced with the challenge of terminating their spousal relationship whilst maintaining parenting roles within the separated family system that now comprises of two households (Madden-Derdich et al., 1999). Also many divorced parents repartner or remarry. This contributes to further change to the family structure, with children now living in one or potentially two stepfamily households. Of the research available, investigating separating families from a family systems perspective, a majority has on most occasions focussed on the ways that parents manage the post-separation relationship and the impact this has on the children. In particular, studies have investigated the impact of inter-parental conflict and coparenting styles associated with child adjustment. These will be examined later in the chapter.

More understanding is needed as to how post-separation families, with children living in two households, function in such a way that child development is supported. This thesis study investigates one subsystem in the separated family, the father-daughter relationship. It examines the nonresidential father-daughter relationship within the fathers' household but also within the wider context of the separated family including the mothers' household. If one or both of the parents repartner, the child experiences a further transition into a stepfamily household. This thesis study will provide insight into fathers' parenting styles and the coparenting styles of separated parents that are most supportive of fathers' relationship with daughters and of daughters' wellbeing.

## **Literature Review**

### **Divorce rates and trends**

Divorce is becoming increasingly common in the western world. It is estimated that approximately half of all first time marriages in the United States of America (USA) end in divorce (Raley, 2004), and that 60 percent of these divorces will involve children (Long & Forehand, 2002).

In New Zealand, approximately a quarter of all marriages end within five to nine years and one third within 25 years of marriage (Statistics New Zealand, 2008). Moreover, data from the Christchurch Health and Development longitudinal study with 1,265 children found that up to 50 percent of children in this cohort were exposed to parental separation by their sixteenth birthday (Fergusson & Horwood, 2001). Therefore it appears that many New Zealand children experience parental separation.

Following parental separation there is a global trend across many western countries for mothers to have primary care of children (Kelly, 2007; Taylor, Smith, Gollop, & Tapp, 2001; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001). In Australia in 2006, 87 percent of resident parents were women (Linacre, 2007), and similarly in New Zealand just under 82 percent of single parent households were headed by women (Statistics New Zealand, 2001).

A three year longitudinal study with 1,124 families investigating roles of mothers and fathers following parental separation identified reasons for why mothers in their study commonly assumed the role of primary caregiver (Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, & Dornbusch, 1993). These reasons included the assumption that mothers are more experienced in parenting and generally maintain more 'flexible work schedules' enabling full-time childcare. Other reasons

included fathers' unstable living environments and reluctance to engage in legal proceedings relating to care of the child (Maccoby et al., 1993).

The extent, to which nonresidential fathers continue to remain involved, however is difficult to ascertain, as many child care arrangements are decided outside the courts, and perspectives of contact differ according to the reporter (Kelly, 2005; Pryor, 2008). Contact also changes with time since the separation and is often perceived by mothers as involving less time in fathers' care than is estimated by fathers (Kelly, 2005). Additionally, more subtle modes of contact including mail, email, and texting are not always included in studies (Kelly, 2005).

However, in general, nonresidential father contact and involvement with children appears to have increased over the last few decades (Kelly, 2000; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Taylor, Smith, Gollop, & Tapp, 2001), with one meta-analysis identifying a 20 percent to 35 percent increase in children reporting weekly or multiple visits during a week with nonresidential fathers (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). Forms of contact will be discussed in more detail later in the section investigating father-child relationships following separation.

## **The impact of parental separation on children**

Research investigating the impact of divorce on childhood adjustment is extensive.

Historically, research utilised quantitative measures to investigate psychological, behavioural, and interpersonal difficulties experienced by children of divorced parents (Hoffman & Ledford, 1995). These studies concluded that children of divorce are at heightened risk for a wide range of problems including internalising (depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem) (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Booth & Amato, 2001) and externalising (conduct disorder, anti-social behaviour) disorders, and associated risk-taking behaviour (sexual promiscuity, substance abuse) (Fergusson, Horwood, & Lynskey, 1994). Additionally, findings from various studies also suggest that these children are at risk for a range of inter-personal difficulties including relationship difficulties with peers, intimate partners and family (Amato, 2001, 2005; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2005). Finally, they may also be at risk for a range of health issues (Rodgers & Pryor, 1998), academic (Kushner, 2009) and socio-economic problems (Amato, 2001; Kushner, 2009; Rodgers & Pryor, 1998). For example, from their meta-analysis of 200 British studies, Rodgers and Pryor (1998) concluded that children and adolescents from separated families have a higher probability of adverse outcomes, with long term negative effects (e.g., poverty, behavioural problems, poorer academic attainment, poorer physical health, early school and home leaving, earlier



sexual activity and depression) twice as likely in children with divorced parents, than those from non-divorced families.

There is also evidence however, that although children experience initial difficulties adjusting to parental separation many adjust adequately in the years following separation (Amato, 1999; Kelly & Emery, 2003, Rodgers & Pryor, 1998). For some children the separation may bring about positive change and relief, particularly in dysfunctional family environments where inter-parental conflict is high prior to the separation (Amato, 2001; Strohschein, 2005).

More recently, clinical research has shifted focus to acknowledge more subtle and long-term forms of distress experienced by many children of divorce, including the painful memories that children may harbour of their parents' separation and long-term concerns they may have well into adulthood regarding their parents' divorce (Cartwright, 2006; Kelly & Emery, 2003, Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). Furthermore, questions have been raised as to why some children fare better following parental separation than others, resulting in a shift of research focus to understanding the complex processes of parental separation that may impact child outcomes.

## **Factors impacting on child adjustment**

Historically parental separation was considered a pathological event. However, with increasing rates of prevalence parental separation is now considered a more normative process in the lifecycle of families (Amato, 2000; Hetherington, Law, & O'Connor, 1993; Kelly, 2000; Taylor et al., 2001). Through the process of separation, and subsequent divorce, parents and children alike experience significant life transitions. These include practical changes to residence, school, and financial stability, as well as relationship based changes, including family reorganisation of relationships, roles, and responsibilities within the family system, and potential loss of social networks (Carr, 2000; Clarke-Stewart, & Brentano, 2006). These transitions may be ongoing with the potential for parents to repartner and remarry (Cartwright, 2006; Emery, 1994; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

The experience of parental divorce is unique for each child. As mentioned previously, it is generally accepted that parental separation is stressful for most children, however, the impact of divorce on child adjustment varies (Amato, 2001). Risk and resilience perspectives suggest that some aspects of the divorce process may be experienced as supportive of childhood adjustment, while others may compound the stress experienced by children and adults, contributing to child adjustment difficulties (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Hetherington

& Kelly, 2002). Hetherington, Bridges and Insabella (1998) defined five theoretical perspectives presented in research that attempt to explain the relationship between parental separation and child adjustment.

The first perspective concerns individual risk and vulnerability for children. Researchers have concluded that individual characteristics of the child, including their temperament, self-esteem, adjustment prior to the separation, age, and gender, may contribute to their adjustment following the separation (Carr, 2000; Rogers, 2004). Children with an easy-going temperament, high self-esteem, internal locus of control, and effective problem solving and social skills appear less impacted by parental separation (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Scott, Booth, King, & Johnson, 2007). Realistic beliefs about the parents' separation, a history of good adjustment to significant events or family transitions and social maturity contribute to better adjustment to parental separation (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Cummings, Davies, & Simpson, 1994). On the other hand, children who blame themselves for their parents' separation or feel abandoned or rejected by their parents or peers are likely to experience more distress and poorer adjustment to the separation (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Cummings et al., 1994; Scott et al., 2007).

In a study carried out by Cummings and colleagues (1994) that investigated older children's (9 to 12 years) reactions to marital conflict, boys' perceptions of threat to self during the inter-parental conflict predicted externalising and internalising behaviour problems, whereas girls' perceptions of self-blame predicted internalising problems in girls.

The second and third perspectives concern the disruption of family composition and associated stress and socio-economic disadvantage experienced by separated families. Parental separation disrupts family composition, as fathers often move out of the household, requiring children to live between two households. Related to the division of the family home is stress and socioeconomic disadvantage that is experienced by many separated families (Hetherington et al., 1998). This is particularly the case for residential mothers who more often experience economic hardship following the separation (Hughes, 2000).

The fourth theoretical perspective concerns parental distress in relation to stressors accompanying the separation, and has been argued as more influential on child adjustment than the separation itself. This is particularly pertinent when parents engage in behaviours that compromise their ability to care for the child (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Hetherington, 1993; Umberson & Williams, 1993). Children who live with parents experiencing mental health issues are at an increased risk for a range of physical, emotional,

social, and academic problems (Amato, 2005; Hetherington, 1999; Noller, Feeney, Sheenan, Darlington, & Rogers, 2008; Taylor & Andrews, 2009). This risk appears higher if children are young at the time, or if parents' emotional difficulties are more severe or chronic (Taylor & Andrews, 2009).

Conversely, researchers have found that sources of external support available to parents and children following parental separation may be protective of child adjustment, assisting parents and providing stability and support for children at a time where their family environment is often characterised by upheaval. These supports may include extended family members, in particular grandparents (Bridges, Roe, Dunn, & O'Connor, 2007; Kruk & Hall, 1995; Lussier, Deater-Deckard, Dunn, & Davies, 2002; Taylor & Andrews, 2009), and extra-familial agencies available to families including those providing parenting programmes (Garber, 2004; Mitchell & Chapman, 2006; Ramisch, McVicker, & Seda, 2009; Robertson, Pryor, & Moss, 2008; Wolchik, Sandler, Winslow, & Smith-Daniels, 2005), and therapeutic services (Bonach, 2007; Taylor, 2004). Parental distress and the associated parenting difficulties will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The fifth theoretical perspective, defined by Hetherington and colleagues (1998), and closely related to the second and third perspectives (disrupted family composition and socioeconomic disadvantage), concerns the impact of changes in family process, in particular, family relationships and roles on child adjustment. Particular characteristics of family process have been found to support or undermine child adjustment to the separation. These include co-parental and parent-child (residential, nonresidential, and stepparent) relationships following the separation. Research has identified that inter-parental hostility (Amato, 2001; Davies & Cummings, 1994), and poor residential- (Hetherington, 1993), nonresidential- (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Gollop, Smith & Taylor, 2000; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Taylor et al., 2001), and stepparent-child relationships (Bray & Berger, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Hetherington, 1999) have been associated with poorer child outcomes (Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998).

Inter-parental conflict prior to, during, and following divorce is a predictor of behavioural, emotional, social, and cognitive problems in children following parental separation, particularly when conflict is frequent, intense (physical or verbal abuse), poorly resolved, and involving children (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Buehler & Welsh, 2009; McDonald & Grych, 2006; Rodgers & Pryor, 1998; Schrodts & Afifi, 2007). Children exposed to ongoing unresolved parental conflict may be more susceptible to trust issues and poor attachment with

their parents; experience more difficulty in forming and maintaining friendships during childhood, adolescence and adulthood; and may be more prone to issues with managing distress, becoming easily overwhelmed or expressing their distress destructively (McIntosh, 2005). However, it is also important to recognise that in families with high inter-parental conflict, parental separation may provide relief for children and may promote child adjustment (Hetherington, 1999; Kelly, 2000). On the other hand, supportive nonresidential father-child relationships (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999), cooperative coparenting (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008), and to a lesser extent positive relationships with stepfathers (King, 2006) have been associated with positive child adjustment. Inter-parental conflict will be discussed in more detail in the next section on parenting after separation.

Research has also identified the importance of ongoing nonresidential father involvement in mediating childhood adjustment following marital separation. Earlier research has revealed inconsistent support for the impact of regular nonresidential father-child contact on child wellbeing (Amato, 2005). Subsequently, research has shifted focus to the qualities of the nonresidential father-child relationship that are important in mediating child adjustment to parental separation (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbusch, 1996; Gollop et al., 2000; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Taylor et al., 2001), in particular, the parenting style engaged in by nonresidential fathers (Hetherington et al., 1998). Research has identified that children who maintain close supportive relationships with nonresidential fathers, particularly where fathers engage in authoritative parenting present with less internalising and externalising problems following parental separation (Amato, 2005; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Particular aspects of authoritative parenting engaged in by fathers that have been associated with child wellbeing following parental separation include fathers' warmth and emotional support, interest, and active involvement in all aspects of children's lives, as well as active monitoring and control of children's behaviour while they are in the father's care (Amato, 2005; Dunn, 2004; Swinton, Freeman, Zabriskie, & Fields, 2008). For example, Amato & Gilbreth (1999), in an earlier meta-analysis of 63 studies investigating nonresidential father-child relationships and child wellbeing, found children's feelings of closeness to fathers and fathers' authoritative parenting (involving support, warm affection and limit setting) were associated with better child outcomes (academic success and lower externalising and internalising problems). The nature of nonresidential father-child relationship, fathers and children's experiences of this relationship and factors impacting on the relationship will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

It is important to recognise that the factors discussed above such as parental distress, economic disadvantage, and inter-parental conflict may first, precede the separation, second, be cumulative in effect, and third, interact with each other, resulting in compounding or compensatory effects. For example, inter-parental conflict may compound parental stress resulting in poorer parenting style (Erel & Burman, 1995; Kaczynski, Lindahl, Malik, & Laurenceau, 2006), and the emotional resources offered by a supportive parent may compensate for the lack of practical resources available to children in a low-income household (Amato, 1993; Hetherington et al., 1998; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Pryor & Rogers, 2001; Taylor et al., 2001). The next section will review the literature pertaining to the impact of parental separation on parenting with focus on the impact of parents' mental health, and coparenting styles, in particular inter-parental conflict on nonresidential father-child relationships.

### **Parenting after separation**

Diminished parenting is common in the first two to three years post-separation (Kelly & Emery, 2003) and is a significant predictor of child adjustment difficulties (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen & Booth, 2000). As separated parents adjust to losses and transitions associated with the separation (significant changes in lifestyle, finances, family roles and relationships and integration of single parenting with work and social needs) they may become pre-occupied with their own emotional struggles, which in turn may compromise their ability to parent (Amato, 2005; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Noller et al., 2008). Residential mothers are at particular risk for 'role overload' as they come to terms with the increased responsibilities associated with becoming a single parent (Noller et al., 2008).

Nonresidential fathers are generally less affected by role overload, however, they may experience difficulty adjusting to the separation and the subsequent disruption to their lifestyle, particularly the impact of living in a separate household on their involvement with children, and potential changes to peer group and family support (Bokker, 2006; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Leite & McKenry, 2002). They may also experience difficulty adjusting to parenting independently, particularly if they were not as involved prior to the separation (Bokker, 2006; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Both residential and nonresidential separated parents are more prone to emotional lability, depression, alcoholism, and drug abuse (Demo & Acock, 1996, Kelly & Emery, 2003). Newly divorced fathers generally exhibit fewer internalising disorders such as anxiety, than divorced mothers, however, fathers present with a greater number of externalising disorders, particularly alcohol and substance abuse

following the separation (Perreira & Sloan, 2001). Furthermore, researchers have identified a risk for parents who experience difficulties coping following the separation to become less positively involved with their children. They may be less emotionally responsive providing less affection, and time, and more erratic or harsh discipline (Amato, 2005; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Noller et al., 2008; Taylor & Andrews, 2009).

There is also evidence that some mothers in single parent households rely heavily on children for both emotional and practical support during times of distress, giving them responsibilities typically reserved for adults (Peris, Goeke-Morey, Cummings, & Emery, 2008). This phenomenon is commonly referred to as ‘parentification’, ‘boundary dissolution’, or ‘role reversal’ (Mayseless, Bartholomew, Henderson, & Trinke, 2004; Peris et al., 2008). Research has suggested that a parent’s overreliance on children for emotional support is particularly stressful for children who may internalise the parent’s worry, which in turn may inhibit social development (Mayseless et al., 2004; Peris et al., 2008) and contribute to more serious externalised and internalised emotional difficulties (Emery, 1994; Peris et al., 2008).

### **Effect of parental mental health issues on children’s relationships with nonresidential fathers**

Little is known about the impact of mothers’ mental health problems on children’s relationships with nonresidential fathers. Some researchers have suggested that in situations where distressed residential mothers are distracted by their own difficulties and less emotionally supportive, children’s ability to establish and maintain close functional interpersonal relationships, including those with fathers, may be compromised (Amato & Booth, 1997; Scott et al., 2007).

Research investigating the impact of fathers’ mental health issues on relationships with children following parental separation is also limited. Some studies have found a tendency for mothers to restrict contact if they perceive children to be at risk, or for fathers to disengage from children to avoid conflict with the former spouse, and when contact with children is perceived as too emotionally difficult (Funder, Hanson, & Weston, 1993; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Leite & McKenry, 2002). Fathers coping following parental separation will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, in the section on fathers’ experience of post-separation parenting.

## **Coparenting styles**

Following marital separation, parents face a significant transition in their relationship from spouse to co-parent. Although the intimate relationship has ended the parental relationship is ongoing. As one parent moves out of the family home parents are faced with the challenge of renegotiating their parental roles and responsibilities, including day to day care of the children, ongoing involvement of the nonresidential parent, and shared financial responsibility. Research has examined coparenting following parental separation and the impact of different coparenting styles directly or indirectly affecting nonresidential-child relationships. Three types of coparenting styles have been conceptualised. These include cooperative, hostile and disengaged coparenting styles.

Cooperative coparenting is characterised by frequent communication between parents regarding childcare and child wellbeing, resulting in unified and integrated rule-setting and management between households (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Most researchers agree that the extent that parents are cooperative and communicate, develop consistent rules between households, and support each other in their parenting practices, the more stability there is for children, which in turn contributes to better child adjustment and quality of nonresidential father-child relationships (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Dunn, 2004; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kelly, 2005; McIntosh, 2005; Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008; Smith & Gollop, 2001). Sobolewski and King (2005) analysed data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) and found that cooperative parenting predicted higher father-child contact, and higher quality, more responsive parenting. This finding was consistent across different gender, ethnic, socio-economic and stepfather/non-stepfather groups.

The second coparenting style described as ‘conflictual’ or ‘hostile’ is more commonly associated with the early stages of separation and is characterised by frequent conflict and little cooperation between parents (Kelly, 2005; McIntosh, 2005). Hostility between parents may be either overt, with children subjected to ongoing altercations between parents, or more subtle, with children being exposed to ongoing criticism between parents (Afifi, Afifi, & Coho, 2009). Children may also be brought into their parents’ conflict, at times being forced to convey hostile messages between the parents (Carr, 2000), or having their contact with nonresidential parents restricted by the residential parent, commonly referred to as gate-keeping (Trinder, 2008). Inter-parental conflict will be discussed in more detail following this section.

Finally, 'disengaged' or 'parallel' coparenting is considered the most common form of coparenting and often replaces conflictual coparenting. This style of coparenting is characterised by parental disengagement, in which each parent has their own set of rules for children and no attempts are made to integrate these with the other parent (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Maccoby et al., 1993; Rosenbaum, 2000). Although not ideal, disengaged parenting has been identified as supportive of child adjustment as it provides relief from inter-parental hostility. In cases where parents continue to "function effectively in their independent domains" (Kelly, 2000, p. 970), this type of coparenting provides adequate nurturing and quality parenting (Kelly, 2005).

### ***Impact of inter-parental conflict***

A parent's inability to detach themselves from their feelings of resentment related to the separation when negotiating parenting issues has been identified as a major source of inter-parental conflict (Madden-Derdich et al., 1999). Other common areas of conflict between parents include disparity between parents' expectations of child-rearing, particularly perceptions of the father role, visitation arrangements, and financial support provided by fathers (Dunn, Cheng, O'Connor, & Bridges, 2004; Noller et al., 2008). Over-estimation of former spouse satisfaction regarding 'day to day care' arrangements has also been associated with inter-parental conflict (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2002). Children's experience of inter-parental conflict may be direct where they witness altercations between parents, often opportunistic in nature during visitation drop-offs or pick-ups, or in some cases during phone conversations (Noller et al., 2008). They may also experience more subtle forms of inter-parental conflict, such as subjection to denigration of one parent by another (Afifi, Afifi, & Coho, 2009; McIntosh, 2005) and times where they feel unable to talk about one parent in the presence of the other due to hostility between parents (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Rodgers & Pryor, 1998; Scrodt & Afifi, 2007). For example, In a New Zealand study, Smith and Gollop (2001) examined 107 children's responses to a question about the advice they would give to parents separating. Nearly a quarter of the children participating in the study made reference to their parents' conflict. They reported witnessing inter-parental altercations and inter-parental criticism and described their distress in feeling caught in the middle of the conflict, further compounding the stress of the separation.

The effects of inter-parental conflict on nonresidential father-child relationships have also been investigated. Many researchers have suggested a negative link, where inter-parental conflict may both directly and indirectly impact nonresidential fathers' involvement with children (Altenhofen, Biringen, & Mergler, 2008; Amato et al., 1999; Hawthorne &



Lennings, 2008; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Leite & McKenry, 2002; Loewen, 1988; Smyth, 2003; Waller & Swisher, 2006). In discussing direct influences of inter-parental conflict on these relationships, findings from some studies have suggested that nonresidential fathers who engage in conflict with their former spouse generally experience less satisfaction in their father role and may avoid contact with children in order to avoid conflict with mothers (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996; Leite & McKenry, 2002).

In addition, mothers who experience hostile relationships with fathers may act to restrict fathers' contact with children (Dunn, 2004; Manning & Smock, 2003; Pasley & Braver, 2004), originally conceptualised as 'gate-keeping' (Allen & Hawkins, 1999), and more recently referred to as gate-closing (Trinder, 2008). This concept is distinguished from situations where mothers are perceived as supportive and facilitative of father-child contact, also identified in the literature (King & Heard, 1999; Seery & Crowley, 2000; Wolchik, Fenaughty, & Braver, 1996), and conceptualised as gate-opening (Trinder, 2008).

Other studies have focussed on the more indirect effects of inter-parental conflict on nonresidential father-child relationships. Indirect experiences of inter-parental conflict may include situations where children are subjected to ongoing criticism between parents, or situations where they witness their parent's distress following an altercation. Within these contexts, children may feel emotionally responsible for the parent (parentification) (Afifi, McManus, Hutchinson, & Baker, 2007; Dunn, 2004; Jurkovic, Thrikiel, & Morrell, 2001; Peris et al., 2008), and may experience loyalty conflicts, particularly in cases where they feel pressured to side with one parent over the other (triangulation) (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Dowling et al., 1999; Schrodt & Afifi, 2007; Taylor et al., 2001). Both parentification and triangulation have been associated with child reluctance to contact with fathers (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Peris et al., 2008).

As discussed previously, many parents repartner and children go on to live in stepfamilies. In the next section I will discuss the research in the area of repartnering and its impact on parent-child relationships.

### **Parental repartnering and stepfamily living**

Life in a single family is often temporary with many parents and children becoming involved in repartnered families (Koerner, Rankin, Kenyon, & Korn, 2004). Stepfamilies have been referred to as the fastest growing type of family. Recent USA statistics suggest that two fifths of mothers and approximately one-third of children under 18 residing with two adults are

living in a stepfamily (Teachman & Tedrow, 2008). In New Zealand, between 1995 and 2007, approximately one third of all marriages were remarriages, with 90 percent of people in remarriages previously divorced. This was a significant increase from the 67 percent reported in 1971 (Statistics NZ, 2009). Although there is no Census data about stepfamilies available in New Zealand, the Christchurch Health and Development longitudinal study with 1,265 children found that approximately 18 percent had lived in a stepfamily for some time between 6 and 16 years (Nicholson, Fergusson, & Horwood, 1999).

Similar to those in divorced families, research has identified that children living in stepfamilies present with more externalising and internalising difficulties when compared to children from non-divorced families (Bray, 1999; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). In particular, child adjustment problems appear more prevalent in stepfamilies established later in childhood or in adolescence, and in those that include children from different relationships (Buchanan et al., 1996; Hetherington & Jodl, 1994; O'Connor, Dunn, Jenkins, Pickering, & Rasbash, 2001). It is, however, important to recognise that stepfamilies have also been associated with positive childhood adjustment, particularly when they are long-term and stable (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Research has suggested that over time stepfamilies provide the opportunity for children to better relate with stepparents, providing another positive parental relationship for some children (Ahrons, 2006; MacDonald & DeMaris, 1996).

### **Challenges of new stepfamilies**

The establishment of a new stepfamily introduces the need for redefinition of relationships and stabilisation of the new family system. When parents repartner, cohabit, and remarry new members are introduced into the family unit with their own family history, established roles, and relationships. The re-organisation of family roles and relationships required during the early establishment of stepfamilies present significant challenges to family functioning (Koerner et al., 2004). Remarriage may create temporary disruptions in the relationship between custodial parent and child, sibling relationships, and more enduring problems in stepparent-child relationships (Demo & Acock, 1996). With no clear definition of the stepparent role, individual family member's expectations of the stepparent role may differ, creating ambiguity and dissatisfaction in the stepfamily system (Doodson & Morley, 2006). Role ambiguity may be further exacerbated by difficulties in balancing relationships with former partners and their extended family (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Bryant, 2006; Demo & Acock, 1996; Smith, Robertson, Dixon, Quigley & Whitehead, 2001; Stewart, 2005).

When asked, children in stepfamilies are often concerned with sharing their parent's attention with stepparents, the biological parent's loyalty, difficulties in communicating with stepparents, and issues surrounding discipline (Cartwright, 2005; Cartwright & Seymour, 2002). These challenges may be further exacerbated by various characteristics of the family. First, the complexity of the stepfamily, whether 'simple' (families where only one adult has children from a previous relationship) or 'complex' (families in which both adults have children from previous relationships), present varying levels of challenge. In complex families, both parents are faced with the challenge of integrating their dual biological and stepparent roles (Berger, 1995). Second, the residential status of stepparents presents different challenges, with nonresidential stepparents experiencing more role-ambiguity and inconsistency in the family household relating to the intermittent nature of the children's visits (Doodson & Morley, 2006). Third, the extent to which nonresidential parents are involved with children in residential stepfamilies and the nature of the stepparent-nonresident parents' relationship may provide challenges for stepfamily functioning (Smith et al., 2001). Finally, the stepparent-stepchild relationship may present different challenges according to the gender of the stepparent. Research has identified that the stepmother-stepchild relationship is more difficult than the stepfather-stepchild relationship, with some studies suggesting more role ambiguity in stepmother stepfamilies, particularly when stepmothers are nonresidential and children are female (Clingempeel, Brand, & Ievoli, 1984; Gosselin, 2010). Research investigating the impact of stepmother-stepchild and stepfather-stepchild relationships on nonresidential father-child relationships will now be discussed.

### **Father repartnering and nonresidential father-child relationships**

Research examining the impact of nonresidential fathers' new partnerships on their contact with children has revealed mixed findings. Some studies have indicated that the father repartnering creates tensions in children's relationships with nonresidential fathers resulting in reduced contact and distancing of the relationship (Ahrons, 2006; Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner, & Williams, 1999; Kelly, 2007). These difficulties may be compounded if repartnering occurring soon after the separation (Ahrons, 2006; Ahrons & Tanner, 2003); in cases where stepmothers are nonresidential (Weaver & Coleman, 2005); where stepmothers are resentful of and unwelcoming towards the stepchildren (Ambert, 1986; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002); and where new children are born into these partnerships, adding complexity to the family system with associated costs and responsibility for the father (Ahrons, 2006; Blackwell & Dawe, 2003; Pryor, 2008). For example, Manning, Stewart and Smock (2003) found in their analysis of data from the National Survey of Families and Households that

approximately half of all fathers surveyed had parenting responsibilities beyond their nonresident children, with 75 percent of those married or cohabiting also engaged in child related responsibilities with stepchildren. In this group, fathers with more biological children in their remarriage maintained less contact with nonresidential children.

On the other hand, other studies have identified an improvement in the nonresidential father-child relationship following the father's remarriage (Aquilino, 2006; Cooksey & Craig, 1998). Although particular aspects of fathers' repartnering that contribute to improved father-child relationships have not been clearly defined, aspects of stepmothers' parental styles that contribute to positive stepmother-stepchild relationships have been identified, which in turn may contribute to closer nonresidential father-child relationships.

In a qualitative interview study with nineteen adult daughters, five 'positive nonresidential stepmother styles' were identified (Crohn, 2006). These were characterised according to stepmother warmth, control, attachment, openness in conversation, and perceived status equality. All daughters described the need for stepmothers to maintain control at a minimum, reserving discipline for fathers. The categories included; 'my father's wife'; 'a peer like girlfriend', 'an older friend', 'a type of kin' and 'like another mother'. At one end of the continuum 'my fathers' wife' was characterised by stepmother detachment, with interaction between stepmothers and daughters reduced to informational exchange only. At the other end of the spectrum, 'like another mother' described a stepmother role characterised by nurturance, instrumental, and emotional support. The other three roles, 'a peer like girlfriend', 'an older close friend' and 'a type of kin' identified by approximately 80 percent of participants were characterised by stepmother warmth, but little or no control (Crohn, 2006).

In an earlier qualitative study with nonresidential stepmothers, four important roles of stepmothers were derived from others expectations and stepmothers' own personal views. These included the need to provide friendship, emotional support, practical care as well as mentoring, and facilitation. The stepmothers were mindful of children's relationships with biological mothers, careful not to infringe on the biological mothers' role (Weaver & Coleman, 2005).

Of the research identifying improved nonresidential father-child relationships following the father repartnering, some have suggested that fathers who remarry may be more family-oriented to begin with and therefore more likely to ensure they remain in frequent contact with children (Aquilino, 2006; Cooksey & Craig, 1998). Others, however, suggest that

through the creation of a family home, in living with the new partner and potentially children, a more welcoming family environment is provided for the children to visit (Pryor, 2008). Hence, it appears from the mixed findings that for some fathers, the added responsibility of maintaining new relationships and potentially new children within these relationships may provide a challenge to the fathers' ability to maintain regular contact with children from previous relationships, while for others fathers repartnering may provide a supportive environment, fostering closeness in the relationship.

### **Mother repartnering and nonresidential father-child relationships**

Research examining the impact of residential mothers repartnering on nonresidential father-child relationships has also revealed mixed findings. Some have indicated little or no association between children's relationships with nonresidential fathers and stepfathers, suggesting that children are able to maintain a close relationship with one parent, despite having a difficult relationship with the other (Dunn et al., 2004; Pryor, 2008; White & Gilbreth, 2001). Other research has suggested a link between children's relationships with nonresidential fathers and stepfathers, but the direction of the relationship is unclear. Of those focusing on the impact of stepfathers on nonresidential father-child relationships, some studies have found that positive relationships with stepfathers may contribute to poorer relationships with nonresidential fathers, particularly father-child contact (Bronstein et al., 1994; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Others have identified barriers created by stepfathers to nonresidential father-child contact. Smith and colleagues (2001) in their UK study of stepparents, residential parents, and stepchildren, found that a small group of children talked of difficulties experienced with stepfathers in relation to contact with nonresidential fathers. Some described that they felt unable to talk about their biological father around their stepfathers. Others talked of their need to remove evidence of contact (e.g., using payphone to avoid their father's phone number being on phone bill) in an attempt to avoid negative altercations with stepfathers.

Of those focussing on the impact of nonresidential father-child relationships on children's relationships with stepfathers, findings from some studies have suggested that children's relationships with nonresidential fathers may not only affect children's relationships with stepfathers, but also impact the biological mother-child relationship. Within this group of studies, some have found that close relationships with nonresidential fathers are associated with close relationships with stepfathers (Dunn, Cheng, O'Connor, & Bridges, 2004; Pryor, 2008; Smith, Robertson, Dixon, Quigley, & Whitehead, 2001), and that difficult relationships

with nonresidential fathers may contribute to poorer relationships with stepfathers (Smith et al., 2001) or in some cases all parents (Dunn et al., 2004; Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984). Other studies have identified that supportive relationships with either the nonresidential father or the stepfather support child adjustment, and positive father-child relationships with both stepfathers and nonresidential fathers contribute to better child outcomes (King, 2006; White & Gilbreth, 2001; Pryor, 2004).

## **Relationships between fathers and children following separation**

This thesis study investigates daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers. This section reviews research into fathers' and children's perceptions of the relationship and finally what is known about father-daughter relationships. Research has demonstrated that although there has been some improvement over the previous three decades (Amato, Meyers, & Emery, 2009; Kelly, 2007), for nonresidential fathers there is often deterioration in frequency and duration of contact with children resulting in poor father-child relationships in the years following the separation (Emery, 1999; Kelly, 2005; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Rodgers & Pryor, 1998). This deterioration is often reflected in research with children, with many describing stress in relation to the limited contact they have with nonresidential fathers (Dowling & Gorell-Barnes, 1999; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Munsch, Woodward & Darling, 1995; Smith & Gollop, 2001).

An example of this deterioration can be found in Smyth's (2005) Australian study using a nationally representative sample of children. This study identified six patterns of nonresidential father-child contact experienced by children: 'equal-shared care', 'standard contact', 'daytime only', 'holiday only', 'occasional contact' and 'little or no contact'. The first of these, 'equal-shared care' referred to an arrangement where each parent had the children for at least 30 percent of nights. This arrangement was least common, reported by only six percent of the sample. The second, 'standard care', was most common occurring in 34 percent of the sample and referred to scheduled contact occurring every weekend or second weekend including one or two overnight stays. The third pattern, 'daytime only', reported by 16 percent of the sample, was characterised by no set schedule and erratic visitation. The fourth, 'holidays only', where children only saw nonresident parents during school holidays was experienced by 10 percent of the sample. The fifth, 'occasional contact', experienced by seven percent of the sample, referred to the pattern where children saw their nonresident parent every 3-6 months, with no overnight stays. Finally, the sixth pattern of

contact 'little or no contact' was experienced by 26 percent of the sample and referred to physical contact between nonresidential parents and children occurring less than once a year.

This can result in feelings of loss for children. In an American study by Fabricius and Hall (2000) investigating 820 college students, 50 percent reported feelings of loss in regards to their relationship with their fathers, a decade after their parents' divorce. They reported that they wanted to spend more time with their fathers during adolescence, with 70 percent wanting their time equally shared between parents, and the remaining 30 percent expressing a preference for frequent overnight stays with fathers.

On the other hand, while regular contact within the context of low inter-parental conflict is recognised as supportive, it is the nature of the contact that appears most influential in facilitating close nonresidential father-child relationships, and in turn, child adjustment to the separation.

A number of aspects of nonresidential father-child contact have been identified as influencing the relationship. These include activities engaged in between fathers and children during the visits, in particular, the father's parenting style and communication; how children perceive the contact; their feelings of closeness with the nonresidential parent; willingness to have contact; and finally the physical environment where contact takes place, including whether others are present (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

As mentioned previously nonresidential father engagement in authoritative parenting styles, in particular father warmth, emotional support, interest, and active involvement in children's lives, has been associated with closeness in nonresidential father-child relationships, and in turn, child wellbeing (Amato, 2005; Dunn, 2004; Kelly, 2005; Swinton et al., 2008).

However, although some nonresidential fathers may adopt authoritative parental roles with their children (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman, & Conger, 1994), most commonly in 'shared care' arrangements, this is not the norm (Bailey, 2003; Sobolewski & King, 2005). Research indicates that many nonresidential fathers engage in a more relaxed and leisure-focussed parenting style, placing less emphasis on structure and control, particularly in regards to routine and discipline (Bailey, 2003; Furstenberg and Nord, 1985; Simpson, McCarthy & Walker, 1995; Sobolewski & King, 2005). Some researchers have likened this type of nonresidential father-child relationship to 'adult companions' or 'good friends' rather than parent and child (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Simpson et al., 1995).

In one US national sample, researchers found that during visits approximately 60 percent of fathers engaged mostly in leisure activity with their children, and the remaining 40 percent mixed leisure time with activities such as helping with school work and discussing problems (Stewart, 1999 cited in Day & Lamb, 2004).

In a more recent qualitative study examining 34 nonresidential fathers' perceptions of their role as a father, three role identities were prominently identified by fathers. These included being a provider (economic responsibility); a teacher (role-model); and a supporter (emotional support, comfort and encouragement of children). Other less identified roles included the disciplinarian (limit setting, rule setting and enforcement, monitoring child behaviour), the caretaker (practical and routine activities), and the co-parent (communicating and negotiating childcare with the mother) (Olmstead, Futris, & Pasley, 2009).

### **Fathers' experience of post-separation parenting**

For some nonresidential fathers, relationships with children improve following separation while for others the relationship may deteriorate, with fathers becoming disengaged despite being closely involved prior to the separation (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kruck, 1993 Lamb, 1999). For these nonresidential fathers, lack of contact with children following divorce may be interpreted as evidence of their lack of interest in the father role. When asked, many men however, have expressed desire for more contact with children and described feelings of grief, displacement, and anger in relation to having less involvement in their children's lives (Arendell, 1992; Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Lyons, 2006; Simpson, McCarthy & Walker, 1995). As one researcher described, "The non residential parent-child relationship is continually interrupted as the child moves between parents. Without the continuation of daily interactions, the relationship needs to be established each time the parent and child see each other" (Bailey, 2003, p. 41).

The disruptive effect of living apart from children on father-child relationships can be further compounded by increased geographical distance (Arditti, 1992b; Arditti & Prouty 2003; Bailey, 2003; Smyth, 2003; Leite & McKenry, 2002), fathers' inflexible working commitments (Bailey, 2003), transport issues (Arditti & Prouty, 2003), and financial constraints (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008; Simpson et al., 1995). For some fathers the experience of adjusting to the separation and living apart from children may be too difficult (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Leite & McKenry, 2002; Lewis, Maka & Papacosta, 1997),



potentially contributing to deterioration in the father's functioning, and disengagement from children (Perreira & Sloan, 2001).

### ***Father role clarity and satisfaction with nonresidential father-child relationship***

Fathers' satisfaction with the contact and quality of the relationship also influences father involvement following separation (Arditti, 1992a&b; Guttman, 1993; Kruk, 1993; Lyons, 2006). Some researchers have suggested that a father's sense of self-efficacy in his role as a father is important for satisfaction and, in turn, understanding father-child relationships following the separation (Karp, 2000; Kruck, 1993; Olmstead et al., 2009; Stone, 2006). For example, Stone (2006) interviewed 101 nonresidential fathers and found that fathers' role-clarity, including fathers' perceptions of self-efficacy as a parent and perception of mothers' parenting ability, were important aspects influencing relationships with the children. Stone concluded from the findings that a father's sense of role clarity is central to understanding father-child relationship quality and that without a clear sense of how to be a father it may be difficult for fathers to establish positive relationships with children (Stone, 2006).

This has important implications for father-child relationships following separation and many researchers have identified a lack of consistency in conceptualising the father role (Bokker, 2006; Leite & McKenry, 2002). Moreover, there appears to be even less clarity surrounding parenting expectations of fathers who live apart from children (Bokker, 2006; Seltzer, 1991). Researchers have suggested that with mothers generally assuming primary caregiver roles in non-divorced families the father role needs to be re-established following parental separation. Men may struggle with feelings of inexperience as they adjust to a more autonomous parenting role and the many associated responsibilities such as providing a good home environment while children are in their care (Guttman, 1993; Lyons, 2006; Mackey, 1996).

When contact is infrequent or brief in duration (Bailey, 2003) it may be difficult for fathers to fulfil these roles, feeling more like 'visitors' in their children's lives (Leite & McKenry, 2002). Moreover, when disparity occurs between mothers' and fathers' perceptions of the father role and restrictions are placed on the father's ability to fulfil the role, inter-parental conflict is likely to occur (Hawthorne & Lennings, 2008; Snow, 2003). As discussed previously, inter-parental conflict may further contribute to less father involvement and further dissatisfaction for children and fathers in these relationships (Altenhofen et al., 2008; Hawthorne & Lennings, 2008; Leite & McKenry, 2002; Smyth, 2003).

Lyons (2006) in her primarily qualitative study with New Zealand nonresidential fathers investigated fathers' parenting experiences, ideas about the parental role, and perceived

factors impacting on their ability to parent. Findings of this study indicated that both father-child contact and fathers' perceptions of the quality of the relationship were negatively influenced by perceptions of emotional distance with children, and beliefs that children viewed them negatively.

### ***Practical barriers***

Geographical distance also impacts nonresidential father-child relationships following parental separation (Arditti, 1992b; Arditti & Prouty, 2003; Bailey, 2003; Kelly, 2007; Smyth, 2003; Leite & McKenry, 2002), in both frequency and in the duration of visits. Many fathers describe the challenge of trying to remain involved in their children's lives when living away from them (Bailey, 2003). Following parental separation, fathers may reside in different cities or countries. When fathers live a great distance from children, visits typically occur during weekends or holidays, and fathers tend to be less involved in everyday routine and contact tends to be more 'leisure based' (Stewart, 1999).

Other barriers to contact and quality of nonresidential father-child relationships may include fathers' financial constraints (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008; Simpson et al., 1995), transport issues (Kelly, 2007; Arditti & Prouty, 2003), demanding working commitments (Bailey, 2003; Kelly, 2007), and issues surrounding fathers' accommodation as in the case where fathers are in-between homes or living with flatmates (Bailey, 2003).

### **Children and young adults' experiences of relationships with nonresidential fathers**

It is important to note that a majority of the findings of studies investigating nonresidential father and child relationships following separation are based on reports by nonresidential fathers or mothers rather than the children themselves. When asked, however, children have identified some factors that contribute to their reluctance for contact with their fathers. These include the inconvenience and disruption of moving between homes (Kelly, 2007); problems in their father's home environment (e.g., limited space, disorganisation, food limitations) (Dowling et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2001); unreliability of fathers regarding visitation arrangements (Taylor et al., 2001); stress from concern over their father's distress regarding the parental separation and feeling 'caught in the middle' of conflict between parents (Dowling & Gorell-Barnes, 1999; Smith & Gollop, 2001). Issues surrounding the father's new partner or children arising from that relationship are also important (Arditti & Prouty, 1999; Taylor et al., 2001).

A New Zealand study comprising interviews with 107 children (55 girls and 52 boys, ranging in age from 7-18 years old) investigated children's perspectives on post-separation family life. Data examined in this study pertained to children's views about the time they spent with nonresidential parents (86 percent nonresidential fathers, 7.5 percent nonresidential mothers, and 6.5 percent shared care). Many of the children viewed contact positively, with 52 percent reporting that the amount of contact was 'just right' and 46 percent wanting more frequent contact. Only 2 percent reported that they would prefer less contact with their nonresidential parent. Many also described the need to be consulted and in some cases involved in decision making surrounding custody and visitation arrangements (Taylor, Smith, Gollop & Tapp, 2001).

Positive and negative aspects of contact identified by children included the importance of children's relationships with their nonresidential fathers (feeling loved and valued, involvement of father in life); the nature of the access itself (fun filled activities, variety to lifestyle) and the value of quality time; inconsistencies between different homes (rules, missing out on seeing friends, sports or socialising); the inconvenience of moving between homes (packing bags, travelling, having problems with homework and items for school, and feeling unsettled); difficulties with relationships with step-parents and new partners; the physical environment (location, cleanliness, food, having to share a bedroom); and inter-parental conflict (either witnessing conflict over arrangements or having one parent criticise the other in front of them) (Taylor et al., 2001). Children have also identified the importance of being able to communicate openly with both parents about issues in their lives, and how open communication contributes to their positivity and ease in moving between parents homes (Dunn & Deater-Deckard, 2001).

There is evidence that parental divorce may adversely affect the parent-child relationship well into adulthood (Weston, 1997), particularly relationships with nonresidential fathers (Ahrns & Tanner, 2003; Booth & Amato, 2001). Although some studies have noted improvements overtime in relationships between children and parents of separated families (Ahrns & Tanner, 2003), many suggest that adult child-parent relationships within divorced families are more typically characterised by less contact, emotional distance, and limited support when compared to adult child-parent relationships in first marriage families (Amato, 2000; Booth & Amato, 2001; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Lamb, 2004). This is particularly the case when relationships between ex-spouses have been acrimonious, consisting of conflict and ongoing denigration of the other parent (Ahrns, 2006).

Zill, Morrison, and Coiro (1993), using data from the National Survey of Children, followed a large national sample of children and parents through to early adulthood. They found that divorced fathers were increasingly alienated from their adult children as measured by the adult children's descriptions of these relationships. Among the 18-22 year olds, 65 percent of those whose parents had divorced reported a poor current relationship with their father, compared with 29 percent whose parents had not divorced. The findings also showed poorer relationships with mothers following divorce although the effect for fathers was stronger.

These findings are particularly concerning given that early adulthood is considered a significant transitional period where parents potentially provide invaluable advice and support regarding their children's decisions about important events in their lives, such as future careers, moving out of home, peer and intimate relationships, making significant financial investments and starting a family of their own (Lamb, 2004). With increasing difficulty for young adults to set financial foundations, many young adults are now more dependent on their parents both emotionally and economically for an extended period of time. Some researchers have suggested that poor parent-child relationships place young adults at higher risk for psychological problems (Furstenburg, 2000). Aspects of fathers' parenting that have been identified in the literature as contributing to closer adult child-father relationships following divorce include regular contact, active involvement, emotional support, and open communication with children in the years following the separation (Ahrns & Tanner, 2003; Arditti & Prouty, 1999; Fabricius & Luecken, 2007; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000).

In a qualitative study, 58 young adult participants reflected on their childhood experience of parental separation and identified aspects of the nonresidential father-child relationship perceived as supportive to children's closeness with fathers (Arditti & Prouty, 1999). These included spending time talking with fathers and living with their father at some stage. Fathers' willingness to openly communicate and their effort to spend time and to be available for children contributed to children's ability to "confront, let go and forgive" (Arditti & Prouty, 1999, p.75) fathers for loss and issues surrounding the divorce, which contributed to healing and renewal of the relationship. Young adult children reported that it was important for fathers to be available and to provide structure, safety, and predictability in the relationship (Arditti & Prouty, 1999).

On the other hand, cooperative co-parental relationships, particularly during childhood (Ahrns & Tanner, 2003; Amato, 2005; Nielson, 2007), fathers' financial contribution following the separation (Nielson, 2007), and supportive stepmother and stepfamily

relationships (Ahrns & Tanner, 2003; Nielson, 2007) have all been shown to contribute to closer adult child-father relationships.

### **The father-daughter relationship**

The father-daughter relationship is one of the least understood relationships in the family structure. Qualities of good father-daughter relationships identified by daughters in both non-divorced and separated families include father interest and affection, support, open communication, and understanding (Coley, 2003; Nielson, 2007; Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008). In a pilot study exploring daughters' perceptions of the father qualities they desired in their relationships with fathers, the main qualities identified by daughters included the need for fathers to 'teach through example, to express love and affection openly, and to be encouraging and supportive'. Some also talked of the importance of contact, shared activities, and experience (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008).

The reality, however, may differ somewhat. Many daughters describe less emotional intimacy and ease during interactions with nonresidential fathers, particularly when compared to relationships they maintain with mothers (Gillman & Way, 2000; Nielson, 2007; Noller & Callan, 1990; Roiter-Eash, 1997). Interactions are often described as activity-based with communication superficial in nature (Gillman & Way, 2000; Nielson, 2007). For example, Gillman and Way (2000), in their qualitative study exploring early adolescent girls' perceptions of their relationships with their fathers (residential and nonresidential), identified two themes. First, daughters described time spent with fathers as generally activity based, and conversations as impersonal surrounding sports, school, and current affairs, avoiding personal issues. Second, daughters reported an overwhelming desire for more time spent with fathers regardless of their residential status.

The superficial nature of father-daughter communication has been attributed by some daughters to the perception that mothers are more willing to initiate more intimate conversations and the daughters' fear that fathers will be 'judgmental or disinterested' (Noller & Callan, 1990). In a study of 423 college students that investigated father-daughter relationships, daughters expressed a need for change in communication with fathers, particularly a need for more "honesty, intimacy, understanding and ease" (p.6) in communicating with fathers. They also talk of needing more financial support from fathers, more one to one time, and coaching by fathers (Nielson, 2007).

It has been suggested that a daughter's need for approval from the father exerts a powerful influence that may structure personal relationships throughout a woman's life (Katorski, 2003; Sharpe, 1994). Some studies demonstrate that from a young age fathers may influence daughter's developing concept of femininity (Naus & Scheffler, 1999) or androgyny (Silverman, 1997), independence, achievement motivation and career choice (Schulerberg, Vondracek, & Crouter, 1984), emotional development and self-esteem (Farb, 1999; Grimm-Wassil, 1994; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Naus & Scheffler, 1999; Wexler, 1996), and future intimate relationships (Gallagher, 2008).

In an American study carried out with 56 college women, the relationship between fatherly affirmation and a woman's self-esteem, fear of intimacy, comfort with womanhood, and comfort with sexuality were investigated (Naus & Scheffler, 1999). Significant correlations were found between fathers' affirmation and self-esteem, fear of intimacy, and comfort with sexuality. Strong positive correlations were found with father affirmation and daughters' self-esteem whereby the more affirmed women felt by their father the higher their self-esteem. Negative correlations were found between fathers' affirmation and fear of intimacy whereby the more affirmed a woman felt by her father the less she experienced fear of intimacy in romantic relationships, which in turn affected her choice of men (Naus & Scheffler, 1999).

An earlier study by Silverman (1997) exploring the impact of fathers' emotional availability on daughters' sex-role, gender, and self identity found that fathers' emotional availability contributed to more androgynous sex-role identity and a richer self-identity. Gendered identity was not solely affected by fathers' emotional availability, which was influenced also by the relationship daughters had with their mothers (Silverman, 1997).

Relationships with fathers have also been associated with daughters' developing body image (Botta, 2002; Dixon, Gill, & Adair, 2003; Parente, 1998), with studies identifying an association between fathers' attitudes, personality traits and behaviour towards daughters, and daughters' body image and eating behaviour. For example, In a New Zealand study with 50 father-daughter dyads, a positive association was found between fathers' attitude to physical attractiveness and their perceptions of the impact of being slimmer for adolescent girls and their daughters' dieting behaviour. Where fathers had strong beliefs in the importance of attractiveness and the need for females to engage in careful control of food intake, daughters were significantly more likely to engage in induced vomiting and lose weight. The authors concluded that fathers play an influential role in determining the dieting behaviour of their adolescent daughters (Dixon et al., 2003).

Finally, some researchers have concluded that father-daughter interactions may provide foundations for daughters' adulthood interactions with men (Cangelosi, 1988; Gallagher, 2008; Naus & Scheffler, 1999) in particular, their preference for intimate partners and comfort with intimacy (Cangelosi, 1988; Gallagher, 2008; Naus & Scheffler, 1999), and also timing of sexual activity and pregnancy (Cangelosi, 1998; Ellis et al., 2003; Dunn, 2004). Some researchers have suggested that girls may seek attention from men and physical closeness that was missing in their relationships with their fathers (Cangelosi, 1988; Hetherington, 1982).

### **Daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers**

There is limited research in the area of daughters' relationships with fathers following parental separation. Within this research there is mixed support for differences between nonresidential father daughter and son relationships. Some studies have identified sex differences in favour of sons for the frequency and duration of nonresidential father contact with children (Amato & Booth, 1991; Hetherington, 1993; Manning & Smock, 1999; Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008), closeness between fathers and sons (Mitchell, Booth & King, 2009), differences of children's openness in communicating with fathers, particularly about interests, sexual issues and problems (Noller & Callan, 1990), and children's perceptions of the extent that fathers understand them (Youniss & Ketterlinus, 1987). Others have found little or no sex differences in nonresidential father contact or involvement with children (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Dunn, 2004; Sobolewski & King, 2005; Whiteside & Becker, 2000), particularly after adult children move out of home (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008).

Peters and Ehrenberg (2008), in their questionnaire study comparing adult-child relationships with fathers from non-divorced and divorced families, found that sons when compared to daughters in both non-divorced and divorced families reported higher levels of affective fathering (involvement and nurturance) and more father interactions when they still lived at home, however, no sex differences were found for father involvement of adult children living independently. The authors concluded that fathers and sons share more common interests, although when daughters live independently they may relate better to fathers.

### ***Daughters' perspectives of relationships with nonresidential fathers***

A small number of qualitative studies investigated adult daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers, and found that many of the women describe a post-separation distancing in the relationship they had with fathers prior to the separation, from being daddy's little girl to one more characteristic of friends (Nielson, 2007; Radina, 2003;

Wallace, 2006). Some talk of feeling detached, betrayed or forgotten by fathers (Wallace, 2006). They describe poor communication particularly in relation to issues surrounding the separation, difficulties trusting fathers, and the need for more affirmation and understanding from fathers (Nielson, 2003).

One interview study by East, Jackson and O'Brien (2006) explored nine women's retrospective perceptions of their relationships with nonresidential fathers following parental separation. Findings of this study indicated that although the daughters expressed a desire to have close relationships with their fathers, many perceived that their fathers were unable to provide them with the relationship they sought. Daughters in this study described feelings of 'hurt and diminished respect' for fathers in relation to perceptions that fathers showed little interest in their lives, and there was subsequent distancing in the relationship.

In another interview study, a small group of adult daughters, recounted relationships with their father following their parents' separation and described closer relationships over time (Wallace, 2006). These daughters attributed closeness in relationships with their father to increased opportunities to get to know their father better through in-depth conversations, engagement in psychotherapy with fathers to address their issues, openly communicating their needs with the father, and independently working through and resolving issues related to the separation and the father. A few daughters talked of their perception that increased closeness in relationships with their father was due to their efforts in maintaining contact, and without these efforts distancing would have occurred (Wallace, 2006).

### ***Impact of father absence or distance***

The impact of father absence or distancing on daughters' psychosocial development has also been investigated. There is evidence that daughters 'mature faster' when surrounded by lack of consistency and instability in the family following parental separation (Cangelosi, 1988). When coupled with a lack of supportive fathering or father absence, daughters appear to be at increased risk for low self-esteem (Cangelosi, 1988; Dunn, 1996; Grimm-Wassil, 1994; Krohn & Bogan, 2001), earlier sexual activity and adolescent pregnancy (Cangelosi, 1988; Ellis et al., 2003; Dunn, 2004), criticality of fathers and males in general (Cangelosi, 1988; Gallagher, 2008), and more difficulties attaining emotional intimacy from intimate relationships (Cangelosi, 1988). These daughters appear more negatively affected by father absence if they infer their fathers' lack of involvement to be lack of interest (Cangelosi, 1988; Grimm-Wassil, 1994; Krohn & Bogan, 2001).



Some researchers have explained these negative outcomes in terms of the variety of ways in which relationships with fathers affect women's future relationships with men. In particular, they suggest that the father-daughter relationship provides a model whereby girls learn to interact with males, offering 'quality attentive, loving interactions', which in turn provide women with a feeling of acceptance and knowledge that they are 'loved by at least one male' (Ellis et al., 2003; Krohn & Bogan, 2001). Hence, although research investigating the effect of parental separation on children and family relationships is extensive, little research has been conducted investigating the nature of children's relationships with nonresidential fathers following parental separation. Previous research has indicated the important influence fathers have on daughters' developing self-concept, academic, and social functioning well into adulthood, however, there is limited understanding of daughters' relationships with fathers following the separation and into early adulthood.

The current study investigates daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers following parental separation. It focuses on young women's accounts of the relationship during childhood, and adolescence through to the present. It includes two projects. The first is based on participants' responses to a questionnaire. The second is based on participants' responses in an interview. Chapter Two provides an overview of the qualitative approach of this study and the methods used. Chapter Three presents the results of the questionnaire project and Chapter Four presents the results of the interview project. Finally, Chapter Five revisits the results of both projects in the context of previous research and discusses implications for future research and clinical practice.

## CHAPTER TWO: OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents an overview of the methodology of the study. The two projects in this study employ a qualitative approach therefore a majority of this chapter focuses on considerations in carrying out qualitative research, and provides a detailed description of the process of thematic analysis and content analysis employed in this study. The methods for each of the two projects are presented in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.

### Qualitative Methodology

Historically, social research has been dominated by the positivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Polkinghorne, 2006), which assumes that reality or a basic set of truths exist, with individuals' memories, thoughts, and emotions viewed as real events. Positivist research aims to establish objective knowledge of a given phenomenon, often through the process of testing hypotheses using methods that are considered to be objective (Bryman, 1984; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Willig, 2001). Positivist research has received a lot of criticism over the years for its assumptions of an 'unequivocal real world' and its limited methodological approaches to studying human experience (Polkinghorne, 2006).

Few psychological researchers now subscribe to a pure form of positivism, with most recognising the inevitable and necessary influence of perception on experiencing and observing phenomena (Morrow, 2005; Willig, 2001). Moreover, there has been a shift toward developing different approaches to observing phenomena (Morrow, 2005; Willig, 2001), resulting in the surge of qualitative methodologies in post-positivist research. Some popular methods currently employed in qualitative research include thematic analysis, interpretive phenomenological analysis, grounded theory, narrative approaches, and case studies (Merriam, 2002a). Despite differences in methodology, all qualitative approaches have a shared purpose, to deepen our 'understanding of shared and personal characteristics of the experiential lives of human beings' (Polkinghorne, 2006; p.72).

Qualitative research aims to gain an *emic* or insiders account of the phenomenon being investigated, attempting to understand the phenomena from the participant's perspective (Merriam, 2002a). Qualitative research investigates people's experience of a phenomenon, and the meaning they give to their experience, including how they make sense of their lives and events they have experienced (Casebeer & Verhoef, 1997; Patton, 1990; Tappan, 2001). Gathering information about the context in which the phenomenon exists is also an important focus of qualitative research (Gilgun, 2005).

Qualitative research is generally carried out on less researched areas and is often inductive in its approach focussing on the discovery of new concepts and theories about the participants' experiences rather than verification of existing hypotheses (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Research is often carried out with smaller participant groups (Bowling, 1997). Data is primarily textual, often using interviews, and open ended questions to capture rich descriptions and deeper meanings of participants' experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2002a; Morrow, 2005).

It is important to recognise that although qualitative researchers do not seek to produce theories that apply to all people, they do attempt to draw some conclusions, examining these findings in relation to previous research and developing a shared understanding about the phenomenon being examined (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 2002b).

## **Authenticity and Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research Methodology**

As qualitative research differs from quantitative approaches in both focus and methodology, qualitative researchers have argued for the need for a different approach to conceptualising and testing validity and reliability (Gilgun, 2005; Morrow, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2006). The extent to which the findings of a study are authentic and trustworthy have been suggested by some researchers as better indicators of legitimacy in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2004; Morrow, 2005). Various methodological practices have been identified and agreed upon by researchers as necessary to ensure the academic meticulousness of qualitative research.

As researchers are the main research tool in qualitative research (Casebeer & Verhoef, 1997; Polkinghorne, 2006), researcher subjectivity is assumed inherent in qualitative methodology, and the strength of a qualitative study is dependent, at least in part, on the researcher's skill and judgment (Polkinghorne, 2006). Qualitative researchers, guided by an underlying theoretical framework may engage in processes to limit or manage subjectivity, or may embrace it and use it in data (Morrow, 2005). Regardless of the approach, it is important that researchers are aware of and transparent regarding their perspective and approach to subjective processes (Ambert et al., 1995, Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Willig, 2001; Morrow, 2005).

## **Personal and epistemological reflexivity**

Qualitative researchers agree that it is important that researchers engage in a process of personal and epistemological reflexivity. Personal reflexivity refers to the process of identifying and reflecting on the ways the researcher's personal experiences and assumptions may influence the research, and subsequently, the way the research may in turn influence the researcher (Willig, 2001). It has been suggested that becoming aware of one's own experiences and associated perspectives coupled with the ability to set these aside (bracketing) will contribute to credibility of the research findings (Merriam, 2002b; Morrow, 2005).

It is important that reflexivity is continued throughout the research process. During data collection, it is important that researchers consider the nature of interactions between researcher and participants, as well as issues that may arise and reactions to those issues. Throughout the process of data analysis, it is equally as important that reflexivity is engaged in, particularly noting when data contradicts the researcher's assumptions, so that researchers can ensure accurate representation of participant responses. This process of reflexivity facilitates awareness of assumptions and biases that may arise through the research process and implications of these assumptions for the research and its findings (Ambert et al., 1995, Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 2002b; Willig, 2001).

## **Personal reflection**

As mentioned in my acknowledgements section, I entered this research with my own experiences of parental separation. I will now discuss my experience, my interest in this area of research, and the assumptions I brought with me into the present study.

My parents separated when I was fourteen years old. I have always had an interest in the impact of father-daughter relationship on daughters' wellbeing and functioning, so when I was offered the opportunity to carry out doctorate research with post-separation families, a study investigating daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers following parental separation seemed a natural fit.

I entered this research with various assumptions about the impact of parental separation on fathers' relationships with children, and how poor nonresidential father-daughter relationships may affect daughters' wellbeing. From my experience and awareness of others' experiences, I assumed that some deterioration in nonresidential fathers' relationships with

children is inevitable following divorce. I also thought that poor or non-existent relationships with fathers may negatively impact daughters' wellbeing.

Given my personal relationship to the topic of daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers and associated perceptions, and the assumptions that I defined at the beginning of the research process, I aimed to approach the research process with an open mind and actively engaged in a process of personal reflexivity. I worked consciously on bracketing my experiences and associated values, particularly during data collection and analysis. Peer reviews were also conducted by two other researchers in the field of family research on the results of the thematic and content analyses. This has helped to ensure that my interpretations of the data and subsequently themes validly reflect participants' responses in the questionnaires and interviews rather than my own expectations, thus, contributing to the trustworthiness of the study.

### **The epistemological framework of this study**

Epistemological reflexivity is the process whereby the researcher identifies and makes the underlying epistemological frameworks (assumptions about the world and knowledge) guiding the research explicit. Different theoretical positions bring with them various assumptions about the nature of data and what they represent in terms of reality. In particular, the researcher must ensure transparency regarding the framework they are operating from within, associated assumptions and values they hold about the world, and reality and knowledge which are guiding their qualitative approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2006).

As mentioned previously, there are a number of different theoretical frameworks employed in qualitative research. Madill, Jordan and Shirley (2000) have distinguished between three broad epistemological frameworks guiding qualitative analysis. These are realism, contextual constructionist, and radical constructionist. Within the realist framework, three distinct epistemological strands have been identified - naïve realism, scientific realism, and critical realism. Naïve realism argues that the world is as it appears to be and scientific realism asserts that rigorous scientific method, although potentially fallible, is required to ascertain *true* representations of reality. Critical realism deviates from the two former strands of realism in that it holds that although there is an objective reality, individuals' experience and perceptions of it are partially constructed based on the social, cultural, and historical circumstances in which they occur.

This study has been carried out from a post-positivist framework employing a ‘critical realist’ stance (Madill et al., 2000). Individuals’ experiences are considered real for the individual while acknowledging that the cultural, social, and historical context in which they occur influence both how individuals experience particular phenomena, make sense of, and recount these experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study is focussed on investigating the experiences and meanings of participants’ experiences with nonresidential fathers post-separation. Through employing this stance it is intended that findings from this study will have practical relevance for future application in clinical practice for clinicians and divorcing families.

This study also has similarities to Interpretive Phenemological frameworks (Cartwright, 2003). With limited research available investigating daughters’ relationships with nonresidential fathers following parental separation, this study aims to provide descriptions of participants’ experiences and also the ways that they interpreted or made sense of these experiences. At the same time, I am mindful of the interpretations I have made of their experiences and interpretations, through the process of thematic analysis (Merriam, 2002b).

### **Meticulousness of methodology contributing to quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research**

Another area which comes under scrutiny when assessing authenticity and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings is the methodology and the ways in which data are collected, analysed and the way in which the results are presented (Merriam, 2002b; Morrow, 2005). The qualitative data analyses in both the questionnaire and interview studies were conducted in accordance with the method of thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The remainder of this chapter will describe this approach, identifying the different styles of thematic analysis, and the various strengths and considerations when carrying it out. Finally, a detailed description of each stage will be discussed, and steps taken to ensure the validity of the results.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The process of thematic analysis facilitates the identification, organisation, analysis, and reporting of themes within the data (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis is widely employed in many qualitative methodological paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to usefully summarise key features of a large body of data and offer rich descriptions of a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman & Burgess, 1994). It differs from

other forms of analysis that search for patterns in data (e.g., interpretive phenomenological analysis and grounded theory) in that it is not theory bound, thus it is flexible within different theoretical frameworks achieving different research goals. Other strengths of thematic analysis include its ability to highlight similarities and differences across data sets, to allow for clear presentation of results, its easy interpretation by most readers, its use for social as well as psychological interpretations of data, its usefulness in informing policy development, and the possibility of generating unanticipated insights (Bryman & Burgess, 1994).

A thematic analytical approach may be inductive, whereby analysis (coding and themes) are concluded from the data itself (i.e., interview content) or deductive (theoretical), whereby analysis is guided by previous research and driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive thematic analysis is typically used when investigating newer, less researched areas, whereas deductive thematic analysis is often employed to investigate research areas that have received some attention with research interest guided by previous findings and analysis guided by previous research designs. Deductive thematic analysis is commonly used when a researcher is interested in providing less rich, but more detailed analysis of a particular aspect of the data or in examining a specific research question as opposed to conducting an exploratory investigation.

Another important aspect of thematic analysis is whether the researcher interprets themes in the data at a semantic or latent level. Semantic thematic analysis is carried out to provide surface or explicit meanings, whereas latent thematic analysis is commonly used by researchers interested in underlying ideas, assumptions, beliefs, and meaning.

The two projects within this study employ different approaches to thematic analysis. In Project one (questionnaire) I have employed a deductive semantic approach to the thematic analysis, guided in part by previous research findings, and particularly interested in aspects supporting and hindering relationships between daughters and fathers following parental separation. In project two (interview) I have employed an inductive latent approach, being interested in the nature and development of the nonresidential father-daughter relationship, exploring the experiences and meanings daughters give to relationships with fathers, as well as the positive and difficult aspects of these relationships.

### **Process of thematic analysis**

In accordance with recommendations made by Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis for both studies will be carried out guided by the following phases:

### 1. Data familiarisation

This involves the researcher becoming fully immersed in the data. This is facilitated through transcription and repeated examination of the transcripts, noting ideas for coding and discovering meaning and patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Morrow, 2005).

### 2. Generating initial codes

This phase involves the systematic manual evaluation of the transcribed text, considering ideas previously identified in the data through re-reading the text and systematically organising the data (extracts) relevant to each code. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), codes identify a meaningful feature of the data that may be explicit (semantic) or more subtle (latent) 'assumptions beliefs and meanings' (p. 88-89). In working with both the questionnaire and interview data, I engaged in a process of listing ideas identified in the data, then organising, and grouping ideas into 'codes' as they became more pronounced in the data.

### 3. Thematic searching

This phase involves synthesised generation of codes into 'potential themes', analysing and considering how codes may combine to form 'overarching themes' and how themes may be further categorised into smaller categories referred to as sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). This stage was managed differently for the questionnaire and interview projects. Qualitative data from the questionnaire was sorted according to the question it pertained to and listed in order of the number allocated to each participant. Transcribed interview data was organised according to participant number. Both questionnaire and interview data were entered into NVivo8 (qualitative software programme) and the data collated in potential themes. Coded data was organised into overarching- and sub-themes as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The process of thematic searching also differed between the interview and questionnaire data in relation to differences in the depth of data obtained. The depth and richness of data obtained from interviews allowed for a more latent thematic analysis, whereby data were also examined for themes relating to participants' underlying emotional and psychological experiences, including how they interpreted experiences and the meanings they placed on these experiences. Thematic analyses of questionnaire data were carried out at a semantic level, as participants written responses were briefer with little description provided of emotional or psychological reactions to these experiences.



#### 4. Thematic review

This involves examining the themes to ensure they are ‘representative of the coded extracts’ and the entire data set. Within this process, grouping of themes may be adjusted, with two themes collapsed into one broader theme or a single theme split into two distinct themes. It is important at this stage to ensure that data (extracts) within themes fit together meaningfully and that overarching themes are unique and accurately reflect the meanings evident in the data set as a whole. This stage provides a good opportunity to identify and code data that may have been excluded in earlier analyses. Following the thematic review, a peer review checking the relevance and clarity of themes and accompanying extracts is also important, contributing to the authenticity and credibility of research findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Merriam, 2002b; Morrow, 2005).

In both studies, the assigned themes were printed out and extracts were reviewed for coherence and meaningfulness to themes assigned. Several iterations of this process ensued. When there was confidence that extracts were representative of the themes, a peer review of the clarity and relevance of themes was undertaken to assess trustworthiness and integrity of coding. A report containing the list of my themes accompanied brief descriptions and 30 percent of related extracts were reviewed by my supervisor and another doctoral researcher in the field of family work. Adjustments were made arising from ensuing discussion to ensure extracts were representative of themes, and that there was distinctiveness between themes. These are discussed more fully in Chapters Three and Four.

#### 5. Definition and naming of themes

This involves defining the ‘essence’ of themes, and further refining themes as appropriate for presentation. Themes were refined and final titles were assigned to themes. Each theme was described in detail, with sub-themes discussed in terms of relatedness to overarching themes and variation within.

#### 6. Reporting

This involves identification, selection, and review of extracts representing themes, relating findings back to the research question, and producing a report of the analysis comparing findings with previous literature in the area. Researchers aim to ensure the write-up is balanced, providing clear and detailed descriptions of themes, and supported by participant

quotations (Morrow, 2005). Chapters Three and Four present the results for each of the projects.

## **Content/Categorical Analysis**

For a small number of questions in the questionnaire, participants' answers were very brief and the qualitative data fell into clearly defined discrete categories. In these instances, a content analysis (Bowling, 1997) was conducted, using a process similar to thematic analysis, whereby participant responses are collected, transcribed, coded, and organised into categories (Bowling, 1997). However, content analysis differs from thematic analysis, in that the data has less depth and falls into discrete categories.

The two projects in this thesis study are described in detail in Chapters Three and Four. The next chapter, Chapter Three, presents the questionnaire project.

# **CHAPTER THREE: QUESTIONNAIRE PROJECT**

## **Introduction**

This chapter presents the questionnaire project that investigates daughters' experiences of parental separation and relationships with nonresidential fathers following the separation, including those experiences that were perceived as supportive of the relationship and those experienced as difficult. Daughters provided retrospective accounts of their experience. Women's perceptions of their current wellbeing (emotionally, psychologically, occupationally, and interpersonally) were also investigated briefly at the end of the questionnaire.

The first section of this chapter outlines the specific methodology and procedure of this project. The remainder of the chapter presents the results of the study.

## **Method**

### **Ethics**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants and ethics approval was obtained through the University of Auckland Ethics committee (Reference Number 2005 / 387). On the Participant Information Sheet, all participants were given contact details for either my supervisors or myself in the case they felt distressed and needed support during or following completion of the questionnaire.

### **Participants**

The majority of participants were recruited utilising an advertisement posted on the University of Auckland website as well as advertisements posted on notice boards around the university campus. Other participants were recruited through the process of snowballing and word of mouth (e.g., friends of friends, family and friends of participants). Attempts were also made to recruit participants through advertisements posted around well accessed community agencies (e.g., supermarkets, libraries), however, these attempts proved unsuccessful, generating little interest. Therefore, the majority of participants contributing to

this study include undergraduate and graduate university students. Of the 55 questionnaires sent out, all 55 were completed in returned.

Fifty-five young women participated in this study, ranging from 18 to 30 years of age with a mean age of 23.75 years. Participants consisted primarily of New Zealand European women (76 percent), and the remaining women (24 percent) consisted of NZ Māori, Pacific Island, Western/ European and Euro-Asian descent. It is important to recognise that of the participants born overseas, all resided in New Zealand during their childhood and adolescence.

Eighty-five percent of women were twelve years or younger when their parents first separated, with the average age of participants at the time of their parents' initial separation, being 7.7 years. Just under a third of participants experienced multiple separations. For those participants who experienced multiple separations, the average age following the final separation was 8.4 years. Just over 83 percent of mothers and fathers had repartnered following the separation. All participants resided primarily with their mothers initially following the separation, however, four moved in with fathers at a later stage.

In relation to contact with nonresidential fathers in the first year following parental separation, 74.5 percent of participants reported regular weekly or fortnightly contact. The remaining 25.5 percent of participants reported monthly or less often contact with nonresidential fathers.

## **Design of the questionnaire**

The questionnaire contained two sections (see Appendix A). The first section addressed general demographics, including participant age, ethnicity, relationship status, education level, employment status, sibling status, age at the time of separation, and contact with fathers in the first year following the separation.

The second section of the questionnaire was concerned with daughters' relationships with fathers. Questions tracked the relationship with fathers following parents' separation, exploring changes in the relationship and as mentioned previously, aspects of contact which, from the daughters' perspective supported and hindered the relationship they maintained with their nonresidential fathers.

The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions, designed to gather information about the characteristics of the nonresidential father-daughter relationship, including frequency and duration of contact with fathers, as well as aspects of relationships with fathers perceived as positive and those experienced as difficult. Participants were also asked to comment on what they believed would have been the best parental care arrangements following their parents separation.

## **Procedure**

When potential participants expressed interest via email, participant information sheets were sent out, which outlined the study and requirements of the potential participants (see Appendix B). Following notification of interest, participants were emailed or sent out paper copies of the anonymous questionnaire and postage paid return envelopes. On completing the 20 minute (approximate) questionnaire, participants were given an opportunity to express interest in participating in the interview study by writing their names and contact details in the section provided at the end of the questionnaire.

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data was transcribed, coded, and entered into the qualitative analysis software programme (NVivo8) to assist in the organisation of data and the process of thematic analysis.

A thematic analysis was conducted on the majority of qualitative data obtained using the process defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), and discussed in Chapter Two (pp. 38-40). A theme was accepted when it represented a significant proportion of the data and was discrete from other themes. These themes represent the data across all the questionnaires and each of these themes, were present in most of the questionnaires.

For a small number of questions, in which participants' answers were very brief and the qualitative data fell into clearly defined discrete categories, a content analysis (Bowling, 1997) was carried out using similar methods to thematic analysis outlined above. See Chapter Two (p. 38) for a more detailed description of this analysis.

As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, peer reviews were conducted on the results of the thematic analysis to contribute to trustworthiness of the study. A report was generated using the NVivo8 software, presenting extracts that had been coded under the various themes. The report was given to another researcher in the field of family research as well as my supervisor

to check for agreement regarding the relevance of extracts assigned to themes. Differing opinions regarding theme titles, descriptions and relevance of extracts representing themes resulted in ongoing discussion until an agreement was reached. As a result of this process some changes were made to the themes. For example, *'Loss of Father'* was originally an independent theme, however after consultation it was decided that some codes relating to the relationship quality were better included as part of the *'Relating to fathers'* theme and the *'Loss of father'* theme became more specifically *'Loss of Contact'*. The names of other themes were also changed following peer consultation to better describe the data group encapsulated. Finally, for some themes, changes were also made to extracts accompanying themes. For example, some portions of text were moved to different themes, and other portions of text were expanded in order to give more context.

## **Results**

The remainder of the chapter presents results from the content and thematic analyses carried out on qualitative data obtained from the questionnaire.

### **Content analyses**

#### **Separation and custodial arrangements**

This section presents results from a content analysis carried out on the data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire (see Appendix A) exploring the reasons parents give for separation, participants' perceptions of their daily care arrangements, and nonresidential father-daughter contact in the two years following the separation.

#### **Reason for parents' separation**

When asked about reasons for their parents' separation, only one participant was unable to give a reason. The remaining 54 participants talked about issues they perceived as contributing to the relationship breakdown. Some discussed a single catalyst and others described a few key issues. Twenty participants (36%) attributed their parents' separation to parents' infidelity, with most talking of their father's extra-marital relationships and a smaller number describing how their mother's infidelity had contributed to the end of their parents' marriage. Fifteen participants (27%) described how their parents' non-reconcilable differences, particularly issues regarding lifestyle expectations, child-rearing, finances and personality differences, had contributed to the separation. Thirteen participants (24%) described how parental conflict intensified in the years leading up to the separation, with

eleven describing how domestic violence (physical, verbal, psychological), and in one case sexual abuse contributed to the marital breakdown. Eleven participants (20%) attributed the separation to one or both parents' mental health issues, gambling addiction, or alcohol abuse. Twelve participants (22%) talked of how parents had drifted apart, with seven (13%) in this group attributing this to one parent spending a lot of time away from home. Finally, three participants (5%) described how their parents were very young when they met and were unable to sustain the relationship.

Hence, when asked about the reasons for their parents' separation, 36% attributed the separation to one parent's infidelity; 27% attributed the separation to parents' non-reconcilable differences; 24% described how conflict had increased in years leading up to the separation; 20% attributed the separation to parents' personal problems (e.g., gambling, alcohol abuse, mental health issues); 22% described how parents had drifted apart; and 5% attributed the separation to the immaturity of their parents at the time.

### **Preferred custody and visitation arrangements**

When asked '*What type of custody or living arrangements would have been the best for you?*', six participants (10%) were unable to evaluate what would have been the custody arrangements for them, and for some this appeared to relate to difficulties in custody arrangements including fathers' absence, conflict between parents and participants recognising the conundrum of not being able to live with both.

Thirty-two participants (58%) reported satisfaction with the care arrangements put in place at the time of the separation, for many living with their mother and weekend visits with their fathers. A majority of these participants described how their mother's home provided stability, more opportunities, and family cohesiveness in circumstances where siblings also lived with the mother. Some described how they appreciated the flexibility around visitation arrangements, and others discussed how their living arrangements shaped them into the person they are today.

Thirteen participants (24%) reported that they needed more time with fathers. Of these, some perceived that living with their fathers would have been the better option, while others believed that shared custody, or living in close proximity to their father would have provided more opportunity to spend time with fathers. Finally, nine participants (16%) reported a need for more structure, consistency, and parental planning around visitation, particularly the need for a more stable home environment at their fathers.

Hence, when asked about what custody or living arrangements would have been best for them, 58% of participants were satisfied with the care arrangements in place; 24% wanted more time with fathers; and 16% expressed dissatisfaction with the structure and organisation around planning visitation including stability in their father's home.

### **Father-daughter contact two years following parental separation**

Participants' responses to the question '*Did the frequency and amount of contact with your father change in the first two years or during adolescence?*' have been categorised into four themes: 1) decreased contact, 2) increased contact, 3) fluctuating contact and 4) contact remained minimal. Participant perspectives of factors contributing to increased and decreased contact are also discussed.

#### ***1) Decreased contact***

Twenty-five participants (45%) described decreased contact frequency with nonresidential fathers over the first two years or during adolescence. Although not formally asked in this question, some participants attributed reduced contact to factors both external and internal to the relationship, and some participants gave more than one reason. Fifteen participants (27%) described how geographical distance from fathers provided significant barriers to the relationship. Eight participants (15%) attributed reduced contact to difficulties within their relationships with fathers, including inability to communicate openly with their father, and fathers becoming more controlling and disciplinarian in their parenting approach. Fourteen participants (25%) discussed how unresolved issues and conflict between family members contributed to less frequent contact. Sixteen participants (29%) discussed how aspects of fathers' lifestyles post-separation negatively impacted on contact with their fathers. These included fathers' new partners, geographical distance, changes in fathers' home environment, and fathers' work demands. Finally, eight participants (15%) described how contact was negatively affected by various issues, relating to their developmental stage. Daughters' resistance to contact with fathers during childhood concerned feeling homesick or missing mothers. Resistance to contact with fathers during adolescence was related to the disruptiveness of contact to their lifestyle, particularly social life and extra-curricular activity.

#### ***2) Increased contact***

Sixteen participants (29%) reported an increase in contact with fathers two years post-separation. The most common factors identified by daughters as contributing to increased contact included closer geographical distance between mothers' and fathers' residences and visits being initiated by daughters and mothers.



### ***3) Fluctuating contact***

Fourteen participants (25%) reported fluctuating frequency of contact with nonresidential fathers determined by issues similar to those outlined above including geographical distance, ongoing issues between parents, fathers' lifestyle changes post-separation, including new relationships, and willingness of daughters and mothers to initiate contact. These have been integrated into the previous two categories as reasons for decreased and increased contact.

### ***4) Contact remained minimal***

Eight participants (15%) reported no change in frequency of contact with fathers, describing limited or no contact. Geographical distance was the most commonly attributed reason with participants describing how they or their fathers resided in different cities or countries following the separation.

Hence, at two years, post-separation or during adolescence, around 45% of participants had experienced decreased contact; 29% had experienced increased contact; 25% had experienced fluctuating contact; and for 15% of participants in this group contact remained consistently minimal.

## **Thematic analysis**

### **Daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers**

This section presents the results of two thematic analyses of the data. These questions focussed on relationships with nonresidential fathers and changes in these relationships following the separation. Analyses of childhood/adolescent relationships will be discussed first followed by analyses of adult/current father-daughter relationships.

#### ***Childhood and adolescent relationship with fathers***

This section presents the results of the thematic analysis of the data from four open ended questions in the questionnaire. After examining the data, it was decided to combine the data from the four questions as this provided greater depth of information about participants' experiences of relationships with fathers post-separation during childhood and adolescence. These four questions included:

1. *Please describe your relationship with your father in the two years following your parents' separation.*

2. *Please describe any changes in your relationship with your father during your teenage years up until present. (Only the data pertaining to teenage years was analysed).*
3. *What was positive about the time spent in your father's care?*
4. *What was difficult about the time spent in your father's care?*

Thematic analysis of the data pertaining to childhood and adolescent relationships with nonresidential fathers resulted in four themes, 1) loss of contact with father, 2) ongoing issues of the separation, 3) fathers' new partner and family, and 4) relating to the father. It is important to note that data in these themes overlaps with some of the data in the analyses of contact above. Themes and subthemes are represented in Table 1 below. Each theme will be presented with a description of the theme. Sub-themes and quotes are provided to illustrate the theme.

**Table 1: Childhood and Adolescent Themes**

a) Loss of contact with father	c) Relating to fathers
i) Lifestyle changes	i) Distant unsupportive aspects of the relationship
	ii) Close supportive aspects of the relationship
	iii) Leisurely based interactions
b) Ongoing issues of the separation	d) Father's new partner and family
i) Caught in parental conflict/ acrimony.	i) Difficult experiences
ii) Visitation issues	ii) Positive experiences
iii) Daughter's ongoing issues	

*a) Loss of contact with father*

This theme pertains to data relating to participants perceived loss of contact with fathers following the separation. Thirty-five participants discussed how they experienced decreased contact with fathers following parental separation, resulting in limited and in some cases no contact.

He was around every weekend to start with and slowly over the next few years the visits and trips became less frequent (Participant 15, age 23).

Participants attributed reduced contact to a number of factors including parents' young age, unresolved separation issues, lifestyle changes, and reduced interest or effort from both fathers and daughters in initiating contact, particularly during the participants' adolescence. Lifestyle changes are discussed below. Ongoing separation issues, new partner and family formation and lack of effort by both fathers and daughters to initiate contact will be discussed in more detail later in the upcoming themes they specifically relate to.

**i) Lifestyle changes**

Eleven participants observed how changes in fathers' lifestyles contributed to limited, reduced, or terminated contact following the separation. Some discussed the negative impact of increased geographical distance between mothers' and fathers' residences on contact with fathers, particularly for those living in separate cities or countries.

He wanted it to be natural for us to be able to pop over whenever we wanted, but given where he lived in relation to my mum and friends, that never really happened (Participant 38, age 25).

Two participants described how their fathers' long working hours following the separation made contact more difficult, contributing to less quality time together.

He changed jobs soon after the separation and began to work nights so even when he looked after us, it was only during the day (till 3pm) and my nana or his girlfriend looked after us at night - this put pressure on our relationship (Participant 3, age 25).

To summarise, participants described how they experienced less contact with fathers in the years following the separation. Many attributed the same to the significant transitions in lifestyle faced by parents and children following the separation, particularly moving homes (in some cases city or country) and fathers work hours making contact more difficult. These findings highlight practical implications of the separation on the father-daughter relationship.

*b) Ongoing issues of the separation*

The second theme pertains to data relating to the impact of ongoing issues from the parents' separation on relationships with fathers. Thirty-one participants discussed how unresolved issues from the parents' separation negatively impacted their relationships with nonresidential fathers. Of these, many wrote about feeling torn between their conflicted parents, some discussed issues surrounding visitation arrangements, and others discussed their animosity towards fathers regarding the separation.

### **i) Caught in parental conflict/acrimony**

Twenty-one participants talked about feeling caught in the ongoing conflict between their parents following the separation. Some participants discussed how they found it difficult when either or both parents criticised each other or made it difficult to go to the other parent's home.

I hated going to visit my father as mum had made me think he was a horrible person so I had preconceived feelings about him. Dad would always talk about mum in a negative way so that always upset me (Participant 9, age 28).

When leaving him, it got awkward. He would put on an act and get us kids crying and being sad because he would say that he didn't want us leaving which would piss mum off (Participant 11, age 23).

One participant described a more extreme case in which her mother had cancelled contact with her father at the last minute and convinced her that her father had chosen not to see her.

I didn't speak or have contact with my father between about 13/14 and 17 as I felt rejected when he visited us about once a month- which upset me as our mother would make us wait for hours with our bags packed and then when it was obvious he wasn't coming told us 'that shows you how much he loves you', he obviously didn't want to visit you's etc (when actually she would ring him up at the last minute and tell him not to come (Participant 23, age 18).

A few participants described how they continued to witness altercations between their parents and often felt torn between their parents.

My mum decided it better if they remained living together for a period after the separation so my brother and I could have a father. But their constant fighting made it hard. I think I ended up seeing my dad as an outsider. We weren't together much and I tried to avoid him (Participant 32, age 22).

Hence, ongoing conflict between parents was distressing for the participants in the post-separation period.

### **ii) Visitation issues**

Ten participants discussed how they were reluctant at times to visit fathers following the separation. Some discussed how during childhood they were reluctant to spend time away from their mothers.

I remember staying at dad's every weekend but I never really liked it. So I told mum and then I didn't have to go then after the first year or so, I found (from what I remember) we kinda 'grew apart'. Seeing him was always really cool, but only if he came to mum's, I felt homesick going to his place-

only really enjoyed it if it was for small amounts of time (Participant 18, age 18).

Others discussed how they became more reluctant to spend time with their fathers due to difficult interactions with him.

I found that he was constantly bringing me down/not supporting me by suggesting I cheated in exams and disregarding my interest in art. Because of this in my later years of high school I decreased the amount of time I spent with him (Participant 51, age 18).

Minimal contact. We didn't talk much at all. If we did it was awkward and dad was his typical self every time I met up with him. I never wanted to see him much and was glad to be away from him (Participant 39, age 18).

Two participants described how fathers attempted to enforce contact through seeking professional support and threatening withdrawal of maintenance payments.

My relationship must not have been terribly good with my father as I remember not wanting to go with him for visitation. It got to the point that a child psychologist was hired to work with me and encourage my desire to visit/spend time with him. I remember times where I would cry and cling to my mother, as I wanted to stay with her. I did not have a desire to spend weekends with my father (Participant 48, age 25).

Guess I wanted to get my power back- revealed through my refusal to see or speak to him. Father became very upset because he felt I was putting no effort into the relationship which made me even more furious with him. He forced me to see a therapist who validated my position ... This power was soon compromised as he refused to pay maintenance money to my mother and so I was forced to see him (Participant 5, age 23).

### **iii) Daughter's ongoing issues**

Fifteen participants described experiencing unease with fathers due to unresolved issues surrounding the separation. Some described ongoing resentment regarding the fathers' behaviour during the separation process.

I just found it too complicated to deal with, as though by seeing him I was letting him off the hook for leaving the first time (Participant 44, age 22).

I felt he came into my life when it suited him. I felt resentful toward him leaving us as a family (Participant 48, age 25).

Others described how they felt unable to discuss feelings about the separation with fathers.

At first our relationship was very uneasy, not because I blamed my dad but because I was very emotional during the first 6 months after the separation occurred, and I felt the need to suppress these emotions in his presence

and try and make things as normal as possible between us. However this only created an uneasy atmosphere where we were both pretending that nothing had changed even though the reality was the opposite (Participant 20, age 19).

Hence, the way in which parents related to each other and communicated with daughters about the separation, custody arrangements, and the other parent, impacted on daughters' feelings about and willingness to stay with nonresidential fathers. Some participants also found it difficult being away from mothers and others felt that being unable to address their own issues about the separation negatively affected the relationship.

*c) Relating to fathers*

The third theme is related to participants' experiences within the nonresidential father-daughter relationship, in particular, daughters' perceptions of how they related to fathers. Participants, when asked how their relationships with nonresidential fathers had developed in the years following the separation, identified aspects of their relationships they perceived as i) distant or unsupportive, ii) close and supportive, and iii) leisurely based interactions.

**i) Distant or unsupportive aspects of the relationship**

Forty-seven participants described aspects of their relationships as distant or unsupportive. Within this group 31 participants discussed how they perceived that fathers had generally abdicated from the parental role. These participants described a loss of a father figure in their lives, with fathers failing to provide supportive home environments for visitation, showing less interest in daughters' lives, or providing poor parental care. Nineteen attributed deterioration in their relationship with fathers to their fathers, or their own personal problems. Finally, 27 participants discussed how they had problems communicating with fathers due to the father's critical nature or his unwillingness to discuss the daughters' feelings about the separation.

Some participants discussed how the quality of relationships with fathers had deteriorated, indicating that fathers had in some way abdicated from the parental role. Some participants discussed how relationships with their fathers shifted from a parent-child relationship to one more characteristic of 'friends or distant relatives'. Some reported that fathers became preoccupied with other aspects of their lives, failing to attend to their emotional needs.

During my teen years, I never disliked my father yet felt frustrated by the lack of understanding/relationship we had. Dad felt more like an uncle to me (Participant 12, age 27).

I discovered that I had unrealistic expectations and needs for our situation that we or I had a kind of co-dependency where I would try to gain emotional input and he would remain aloof, not answer all my questions etc. I thought we were close but lately I accept that it was probably just a projection of what I wanted us to be like. In all honesty we were more like distant relatives (Participant 40, age 30).

One participant described how she was not allowed to call her father 'dad', which coupled with limited contact resulted in her feeling rejected.

When I was younger I never understood why he wouldn't allow me to call him dad. I always had to call him by his first name. When I got older this put another barrier in that it hurt me to think he didn't want to be identified as my father (Participant 51, age 18).

A group of participants thought that fathers had shown little interest in their lives. Some described how their fathers rarely initiated contact, while others described how even when in contact, their fathers were often inattentive to their lives, with conversations often focused on things going on in the father's life.

I don't think I saw him very much and I don't think he was very interested. During our childhood, if dad had something better to do on his weekend we were told we weren't going to dad's that weekend (Participant 53, age 21)

Very non-communicative. I was always concerned he didn't care. He was incapable of saying anything, no honesty. Thought he cared about other family more than me. Thought he wasn't proud, didn't notice me. At 15, I was very angry with him, dropped art (he is an artist) but he didn't notice anyway (Participant 21, age 30).

Nineteen participants described their fathers' personal problems and neglectful or angry parenting styles. Predominantly, they talked of how they perceived that their fathers' excessive substance use, physically abusive behaviour, or mental health issues had adversely affected the relationships.

He was always drunk, we were often dragged to parties, I had to look after him instead of the other way round (Participant 27, age 23).

The abuse and dealing with his temper. Sometimes his reasoning just didn't make any sense. That time spent in my father's care was mostly a time of living in fear for me. When I heard a loud thump in the house, then I knew someone was getting a hiding. It wasn't a good feeling (Participant 39, age 18).

Bad he had a nervous breakdown and blamed me for the separation. He was a mess and I didn't want to be around him (Participant 14, age 20).

They wrote about difficulties they experienced communicating with their fathers following their parents' separation. Many described communication as awkward, superficial and at times conflictual. As mentioned previously, for some participants communication difficulties arose from the participants' perceived inability to discuss their feelings regarding the separation.

Stopped communication because I believed it was too awkward and too much of an effort. I was too busy and didn't want to talk to him just in case feelings came through and with me being angry (Participant 11, age 23).

Others described experiences of ongoing criticism from fathers, resulting in participants' feelings of resentment and rejection.

As a teenager, I despised the way my dad treated us and me, always putting us down and never being satisfied with our achievements (Participant 36, age 26).

I felt that he was constantly bringing me down/not supporting me but suggesting I cheated in exams and disregarding my interests in art (Participant 51, age 18).

## **ii) Close supportive aspects of the relationship**

On the other hand, 37 participants described aspects of the relationship experienced as close or supportive. Some discussed how fathers provided a positive and supportive home environment, showed interest, and were actively involved in various aspects of their lives.

Growing up I used to have nightmares and always climbed into bed next to him. I felt protected by him. Very intelligent and creative man, we did fun things as a family. He always helped me with my homework and was committed to this and assisting me with projects and my studies when I was a student. He was very encouraging and believed in me totally. Was always cheering me on and teaching me to succeed in sport and academics (Participant 5, age 23).

Others discussed how open and more 'meaningful' communication was helpful in facilitating closeness with fathers, with daughters feeling able to openly discuss issues about the separation and other issues existing in their lives.

He answered my questions (about anything)...He listened to my complaints about my mother etc ... He told me how he was feeling and I listened and we could talk about emotional stuff if we felt like it (Participant 31, age 30).

A smaller group of participants discussed how they shared interests and values with their father, contributing to closer bonds.



It was really nice getting to know him because I didn't really understand him up until that point ... He knows and values the same things as me like family and knowledge (Participant 14, age 20).

My father and I have similar personalities and so are interested in similar things ... I found that the more time I spent living with him the more he would talk about his past and things that were important to him. I learned a lot about his family and that was important to me. It was nice getting to have that relationship with my father (Participant 24, age 18).

Finally, another group of participants talked about supportive aspects of the relationship and discussed how time with fathers contributed to a better understanding of fathers, feeling more connected to the paternal extended family, and acquiring better understanding of their cultural backgrounds through contact with their fathers.

Yeah and because we were very close with his family, like we'd still see his brothers and his mum my nana so we'd spend lots of time at his family home (Participant 46, age 21).

### **iii) Leisurely based interactions**

Twenty-nine participants described aspects of their relationships with nonresidential fathers as more activity and 'treat' based with fathers taking on more of a 'playmate' role, and adopting a more relaxed parenting style. Many participants in this group discussed the special activities they engaged in with fathers during their visits, with many reporting outings to theme parks, various recreational pursuits, out of town adventures, and fun activities around the home.

We would always do fun things- things I would enjoy as a child. Swimming, basketball, netball, volleyball, skiing, snowboarding, fishing, watching TV, going to the movies, going to rainbows end, the list is endless. Although I heartily loved my mother, I really LOVED the time I spent with dad. She had poor physical health and could never play physical games with me. Also, my dad was more on my level he was really like a big kid and we would have the best times together ... I guess it was more or less a dream world for a kid, a very different place from my home with my mother (Participant 23, age 18).

He always had treats for us and planned special outings. One of my best holidays was when dad took us canoeing on the Wanganui River for five days. The times we went to him he did make a special effort (which looking back made it harder for mum who was left doing all the disciplining) ... He often took us to the speedway and possum hunting was always a treat too! (Participant 10, age 28).

Some participants referred to their father's relaxed parenting style, discussing how they experienced less discipline while in the care of fathers, describing fathers as possessing a 'young fun attitude', and referring to times where they felt spoiled by their father.

He let me do whatever I wanted. In the school holidays was the best because he is a truck driver so I used to go away with him and stay at motels (very exciting for a little kid), and eat junk food for dinner (Participant 28, age 18).

I thought of my dad as very cool and always felt excited to see him. He did spoil us and treat us to things we wouldn't normally do with mum (Participant 46, age 21).

To summarise, a majority of participants described experiencing difficult aspects of their relationships with nonresidential fathers. Some talked about how they felt fathers were less interested or more critical of their lives, while others reflected on their how fathers' personal problems (i.e., reckless lifestyle, mental health issues and abusive behaviour) contributed to a perceived loss of supportive father role. These findings highlight the difficult transition many nonresidential fathers may experience in providing continuity of care, demonstrating unconditional love and attention to daughters while adjusting, in many cases to difficult changes in their own lives.

Experiences that contributed to closeness in relationships with fathers included fathers adopting a supportive, approachable and active parenting style, and demonstrating interest and active involvement in daughters' lives. Father approachability, whereby daughters felt able to openly discuss any issues they were experiencing about the separation and other aspects of their lives, was also highly valued in this group, as was as reciprocity, where fathers shared aspects of themselves with daughters, contributing to mutual understanding and respect.

Finally, many participants made reference to the recreational and more permissive parental role adopted by fathers following the separation. These fathers appeared to connect with their daughters through engagement in fun activities, treats, and adopting more of a 'playmate role'. These efforts appeared appreciated by most participants.

#### *d) Father's new partner and family*

The fourth theme relates to the impact of fathers' repartnering and involvement in new families on relationships with daughters. This theme relates to the 83.6% of participants that reported that their father had repartnered following the separation, however is reported in proportions related to the entire participant group.

### **i) Difficult experiences**

Twenty three participants (42%) discussed how difficult relationships with fathers' new partners and families impacted on their relationships with fathers. Some described how stepmothers provided significant barriers to relationships with fathers.

His partner didn't like us and didn't want dad to have much to do with us. I didn't see him much. He wasn't much of a support and didn't contact me much. When I would visit I would meet him down his driveway and not feel welcome by him (Participant 13, age 30).

My brothers and I didn't like my dad's second wife and I remember she made it quite obvious she preferred it when we weren't around. They were together 8-10 years. I pretended to get along with her for my dad's sake but actually thought she was a witch (Participant 10, age 28).

Others described feeling jealous of the father's partner and new family, particularly in relation to sharing his attention and love. Some participants described how, in response to their insecurity, they changed their behaviour in attempts to feel more loved, while others harboured resentment and resistance to the relationship.

It was hard when he had a new family. I wished I spent the time with him that they did. Was always trying to be good and perfect for more love (Participant 26, age 27).

I also remember strong feelings of jealousy when in the presence of women he was obviously dating- no doubt stemming from the lack of attention he showed myself and my brother (Participant 52, age 22).

As I grew older I had to deal with feelings of bitterness and jealousy over the differences in how I and his other children were raised (Participant 40, age 30).

### **ii) Positive experiences**

Only four participants (7%) described their relationships with fathers' new partners and families as positive. Of these, two talked about how spending time at the father's home provided an opportunity to get to know their half siblings, and the other two discussed how stepmothers provided a good role model and homely environment. These positive relationships did not appear to impact on closeness with fathers, rather they contributed to daughters' enthusiasm in spending time with fathers.

I was exposed to a different style of mothering through my stepmother, a valuable experience. She was probably one of the best role models and unconditional supporters at the time (Participant 40, age 30).

I have two other sisters and another brother from his 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage - loved them - loved them as babies (9, 11 and 12 years younger than me). Foodwise, stepmum was a great cook, my mum not so much (Participant 21, age 30).

To summarise, many of the participants, talking of fathers' new partners or stepfamily living, described difficult experiences. These predominantly concerned perceived barriers created by stepmothers and ongoing jealousy by participants in relation to sharing their father's attention and time with new partners and children in these relationships. Of the small group of participants reporting positive experiences, stepmothers provided positive role-models and stability to their lives, and siblings were considered important in their lives.

With a majority of participants in this project reporting that their fathers had repartnered, fathers' new partnerships and stepfamily formation should be considered when examining the impact of separation on father-daughter relationships. These findings highlight the significant influence new partnerships and stepfamilies can have on daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers. They provide another complexity to these relationships and reveal potential for both hindrance and support for the nonresidential father-daughter relationship.

The remainder of this chapter presents the themes related to participants' descriptions of current adulthood relationships with fathers.

### **Current/adult relationships with fathers**

This section presents the results of the thematic analyses of the data from two open-ended questions on the questionnaire. These are:

1. *Please describe any changes in your relationship with your father during your teenage years up until the present. (only data pertaining to current relationship analysed)*
2. *Please describe your current relationship with your father.*

Participant responses obtained from the questionnaires relating to current relationships with fathers were categorised into three distinct but related themes, 1) distant or superficial relationships, 2) mending relationships and 3) close relationships.

### *Distant or superficial relationships*

Thirty-four participants (62%) described their current relationship with fathers as distant or superficial in nature. Some talked of father loss, with some describing how they now viewed their fathers as more like a 'friend or distant relative', and others maintained no relationship with fathers.

I don't see him as my father. I stopped contact because I didn't want things to get awkward, never really felt close to him but never hated him. I would feel bad about myself not keeping in contact but we both never really tried. Just recently went and saw him, acted like everything was fine, and it is because I don't treat him or burden him, as a father. He is really just a distant uncle that I get on with (Participant 11, age 23).

Others in this group discussed how they perceived conversations with fathers as generally superficial, with some describing feelings of unease or inability to discuss their lives or concerns in any depth with fathers.

We are not close that is I do not talk to him about deep/meaningful things in life or problems that I have (Participant 48, age 25).

Pretty good would like to be closer. See him once every two weeks for family dinner. Not the kind of relationship where if I was in need for someone for guidance would I seek him out. Very surface conversation (Participant 45, age 22).

My dad treats me as a friend or a friend of a friend sort of person. Our conversations consist of strained joking and awkward silences. I feel like a tool for getting my mum back for him and that he is not interested in a father-daughter relationship like I am. But I have come to realise it's just his nature (Participant 32, age 22).

Lack of intimacy in current relationships with fathers was also attributed to various practical barriers. Some participants discussed how practical barriers including geographical distance (different city or country) and their own busy lifestyles restricted contact with fathers and in turn the quality of the relationship.

We keep in touch by text, and letter and phone, but we don't see each other as I am in Auckland and he is in Wellington (Participant 23, age 18).

I guess I don't really spend as much time as I really should with him- but spending as much time together isn't really as important to us now as it was when I was younger - we are both busy in our lives and I guess our priorities lie elsewhere now ... and I grew up a bit and became more independent from all of my parents (Participant 19, age 20).

Some participants attributed the distance in relationships with their fathers to minimal contact and perceptions that fathers lacked interest in their lives.

He is involved primarily in a financial way. He lives a short distance from my mother so drops in to her house for brief 5 minute visits. He is involved in my life only when it is convenient for him. He rarely calls or invites me over. I have to always initiate plans with him in order to maintain any resemblance of a relationship. He shows little interest in what I am doing and does not seek to develop a strong relationship with me or get to know me in any deeper way. It is a very surface level relationship (Participant 4, age 21).

Subsequently, many participants described feelings of rejection, inadequacy, and resentment in relation to lack of closeness with their fathers.

We are estranged by being in different countries. We communicate via email and rarely on personal subjects. He asks me few or no questions about me or my life. I have learned to do the same as when I have tried to show an interest, start a discussion, he hasn't answered or the conversation has tailed off inconcluded. I feel like an interruption, an intruder from a past life!! We rarely swap photos, as before, we are like distant relatives, friendly but not close (Participant 40, age 30).

I feel like I am not good enough for him, we don't talk about as much stuff as we used to, and now talk about a small range of things which is not good (Participant 3, age 25).

For some participants, this resulted in a desire for closer relationships with fathers, while for other participants, feelings of resentment contributed to their own disinterest and rejection of fathers.

I feel like he is a lost man ... creating a sort of distance between us that I do not think will be repaired for some time to come, if ever ... I often miss my father and wish I had the time to see him. In spite of being eighteen, I really and truly do miss having a father (Participant 42, age 18).

Minimal contact, I can't be bothered with my father, I no longer class him as my father as he has never been there for me. I now prefer to not acknowledge his existence (Participant 28, age 18).

### ***Mending relationships***

Ten participants (18%) described how they were in the process of mending relationships with their fathers, with some only recently initiating contact with fathers.

I have recently been in contact with my father to make him aware that he has become a granddad. So there is potential for the beginning of a relationship to be built with him (Participant 8, age 24).

Others talked about how they were going to visit their fathers for the first time after years of no contact.

I will hopefully visit him in April [this year]. This will be the first time we've met in 17 years. He sent me a birthday card this year. It's the best birthday gift I ever received (Participant 1, age 30).

The remainder acknowledged how their relationships had improved over the years.

We are not extremely close but we are mending our relationship. We are in contact. He is living in Australia at the moment and we speak on the phone about once a month. We are having a better time when we are together than we used to (Participant 13, age 30).

Four participants reported that although relationships were improving with their fathers they continued to experience ongoing resentment or feelings of rejection about the father's new-partner and family.

Our relationship is probably better than it has been. I think I have tried to let go of my grudges (mainly financial) but sometimes still feel a bit resentful as he now has two teenage boys and a stepdaughter and puts a lot of energy and money into their lives. I am happy he has finally got it right but it's hard to see what we missed out on (Participant 10, age 28).

### *Close relationships*

Eleven participants (20%) described their relationships with fathers as close. Most described their fathers as interested in their lives, emotionally supportive, and approachable. They reported feeling able to seek fathers' advice and support, and sharing a mutual respect for each other.

My father and I are now especially close. We talk quite often and plan trips to see each other. We both confide in each other and have a mutual understanding and respect for one another (Participant 46, age 21).

Whenever I find myself stressed or upset, dad always puts things in a different perspective and helps me to see things from a better angle. He is very accepting and interested in my life (Participant 10, age 28).

Some acknowledged how they maintained frequent regular contact with fathers, further contributing to their closeness.

Close. Regular contact, although we are in different cities we see each other regularly. I have a lot of respect for my father (Participant 12, age 27).

I have recently moved back in with my mother after three years of living with my father. While our relationship has changed from what it was when I was living with him we are still very close. We make an effort to meet up for dinner at least once a week to catch up and keep our relationship (Participant 24, age 18).

Furthermore one participant discussed how even though she was unable to see her father often, she continued to feel close and felt able to access support from her father if needed.

Our relationship is strong and quite mutual - we go to each other for advice and support. Don't see him that often as we are quite busy but know we can speak whenever we want to (Participant 38, age 25).

To summarise, just over three-fifths of participants' relationships with fathers were described as distant and superficial. Of those describing distant superficial relationships with fathers, many continued to talk about loss of the father role, with fathers becoming more like friends and interactions superficial in nature. Approximately one fifth of the relationships were described as close. Experiences contributing to closeness in relationships included fathers' emotional supportiveness, approachability and interest in daughters' lives. The remaining participants talked about mending or improving relationships with fathers suggesting that some relationships, at least from the daughters' perspectives, can improve or strengthen as daughters move into adulthood. Frequency of contact was also important although not essential.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEW PROJECT**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the interview project of this thesis study. This project investigated daughters' experiences of relationships with nonresidential fathers from childhood through to the present day. To date, there are few qualitative studies exploring daughters' relationships with fathers, and even fewer investigating the nature and development of this relationship following parental separation into adulthood. In line with the questionnaire project, I was particularly interested in how these relationships developed in the years following the separation, and in exploring the experiences of daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers and the meaning daughters placed on the quality and type of relationships they maintained with fathers. I was also interested in daughters' perceptions of how relationships with fathers had impacted on themselves and on their sense of wellbeing. Current adult father-daughter relationships were also investigated in this project, and the nature and importance of these relationships for daughters during adulthood.

The first section of this chapter outlines the specific methodology and procedures of this project. The remainder of the chapter presents the results of this project.

### **Method**

#### **Ethics**

All interview participants were provided information of support they could access should they feel distressed and require support in relation to issues arising in the interview process, initially through the PIS provided at the beginning of the questionnaire project and following completion of the interview. At the end of the interview, I checked in with all participants how they were feeling. Although some participants expressed sadness and tearfulness in the interviews, all participants reported feeling calmer at the end of the interview and many expressed a sense of valuing the process.

#### **Participants**

Sixteen participants were recruited from the questionnaire project to take part in the interview project. A range of participants with different experiences were selected. Participants were not invited to take part in the interview study if they had talked about high levels of current stress or difficulty in the questionnaire. This was based on the rationale that in-depth

recounting of their parents' separation and experiences following the separation could elicit difficult memories that some participants may have difficulty coping with.

Participants consisted of 12 New Zealand European women and four non-European women. Their ethnic identity is not identified in order to protect their confidentiality and privacy. Participants' ages were evenly spread across the 18-30 year range, with the mean age of participants 24.2 years at the time of study. Participants' age at the time of their parents' separation ranged from 1 to 15 years, with a mean age of 6.4 years. Seventy-five percent of participants reported being involved in intimate relationships at the time of the study with 57 percent reporting long-term, de-facto, or marital relationships. Ninety-four percent of participants in the interview project reported that their mothers had repartnered, and 75 percent reported that their fathers had repartnered following the separation.

Contact with fathers in the first year following separation ranged from 2-3 times a week through to those that saw fathers less than once a month. Thirty-one percent of participants reported regular weekly contact (1-3 days per week), 56 percent reported fortnightly contact (1-3 days per fortnight), and 12 percent reported only seeing their fathers once a month or less. In the two years following and through adolescence, 69 percent of participants reported reduced contact, and 31 percent reported fluctuating contact with fathers (four increased then reduced; one reduced then increased). The three main reasons for reduced contact that were identified by the daughters in the interview project included 1) geographical distance, with many children and fathers moving to different cities or countries; 2) daughters' reluctance to be in contact associated with inter-parental conflict and fathers' critical behaviour; and 3) perceived barriers created by the father's new partner and new family commitments.

### **Data collection – interviews**

Participants were contacted via phone or email, and an interview date and time was organised. Interviews were carried out either in an allocated room in the university campus or at their homes, as designated by the participants.

Prior to the interview being carried out, participants were informed about the interview process, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured. Participants were given a consent form to complete (see Appendix C). Within this form they were given the opportunity to request a summary of the findings following completion of the study.

The semi-structured interviews were designed to explore daughters' relationships with fathers in the years following the parental separation until present day (see Appendix D for more

detailed interview guide). Individual interviews lasted between 1 and 1 ½ hours and were organised into four sections. The first part of the interview was focussed on establishing a relationship with participants, with questions asked around demographic details provided in the questionnaire. The second part of the interview followed daughters' relationships with their fathers from early childhood memories through to present day. Participants were initially asked about their earliest memories of fathers prior to the separation. They were asked about time spent together and how involved fathers were in parenting. Participants' experiences of relationships with fathers following the separation were then explored from childhood through adolescence, focusing on the frequency and nature of father-daughter contact and changes in the relationship over time. Prompts were used if necessary to encourage participants to talk about types of activities engaged in during this time, positive and difficult experiences of time together, and mothers' supportiveness of contact. The third section examined participants' perceptions of the impact relationships with fathers had on their self concept. Participants were initially asked, *'How would you describe yourself as a person/woman?'* followed by the question, *'How do you think your relationship with your father has influenced the way you see yourself as a person/woman?'* Given the focus on obtaining an in depth account of participants' experiences and the meanings they placed on these experiences, probing questions were used during the interview process including, *'What was that like for you?'*, *'How did you feel at the time?'*, *'Why do you think that happened/he or she was like that?'*, and *'How did you cope with that?'* Finally, participants were asked what *advice* they would give to fathers following separation.

## **Data analysis**

Each of the interviews were transcribed and entered into the qualitative analysis software programme (NVivo8) to assist in organisation of data and carrying out thematic analyses. Thematic analysis was carried out in a 'rigorous and thorough' five-step process according to guidelines set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). These steps included 1) familiarisation with data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes and, 5) defining and naming themes (see Chapter Two, p. 37-40).

Prior to the thematic analysis the data were organised into five categories of data according to questions asked in the interview. The content areas were 1) relationships with fathers prior to the separation, 2) relationship with nonresidential fathers following the separation during childhood and adolescence, 3) current relationships with fathers, 4) the influence of fathers on daughters' identity, and 5) participants' advice to separating fathers. The majority of the

interview data is concerned with daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers during childhood and adolescence and currently.

A thematic analysis was then carried out on each of the five categories of data. The data were explored for experiential themes and the ways in which daughters understood and gave meaning to these experiences. A theme was accepted when it represented a significant proportion of the data and was discrete from other themes. These themes represent the data across all the interviews and each of these themes was present in most of the interviews. As with the questionnaire study, a peer review of the data analysis was carried out by another researcher in the field of family research and my supervisor.

## **Results**

### **Relationships with fathers prior to the separation**

This section presents an analysis of the data pertaining to relationships with fathers prior to parental separation. At the beginning of the interviews participants were asked about their early childhood relationships with fathers. Four participants were unable to recall relationships with fathers prior to the separation. The remaining 12 participants' responses were grouped into two themes 1) distant or uninvolved fathers and 2) close supportive fathers.

It is important to acknowledge that although this study focuses on daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers following parental separation, relationships prior to the separation provide a baseline from which to compare the development of relationships following the separation.

### **Distant or uninvolved fathers**

Six participants described relationships with fathers prior to the separation as difficult and detached, with some talking of the father's absence as mainly attributable to his work commitments, working in roles that required unsociable working hours, or frequent travel. As one participant said,

I don't really remember specific events a lot but I remember my dad not really being around, only around at funny hours because he worked shift work. So sometimes he'd be home during the day and sometimes he wasn't home for a couple of days (Participant 48, age 25).

Others described how fathers were physically present but not actively involved in parenting daughters. One participant talked about her father's inattentiveness at times, resulting in her preference for spending more time with her mother.

I remember him reading the newspaper and you would be talking to him and he would be doing that 'yep, yep, yep (laugh)' I am not listening and yeah just umm I didn't hang out with him much I tended to hang out with mum a bit more (Participant 13, age 30).

### **Close supportive fathers**

Six participants described their relationships with fathers as close prior to the separation, with fathers perceived as supportive and actively involved in parenting. Fathers in this group were described as fun, loving, and interested in daughters. They participated in most areas of their daughters' lives, particularly schooling, extra-curricular activity, home routine, and play. One participant whose parents separated when she was a teenager talked about her father's interest and active involvement during her childhood.

He's was always really involved with us, taking us to school and he always was the fun one, playing with us and dancing around the room and doing silly things and making me skip to school with him, stuff like that ... He's like the big kid that never grew up ... he was very into our sports. I did gymnastics competitively. It was quite embarrassing, I could hear him yelling. Yeah he was always supportive of our extra-curricular activities (Participant 22, age 20).

Another participant recalled her father's presence in her childhood, and his encouragement and active involvement in her life, despite his demanding work commitments.

Yeah he was a really present father and he was really supportive. He took us to school and he helped with homework and he was always sort of encouraging us to practice sports and like you know taking us out and practicing sport with us or by standing by the pool and edging us along so he was very supportive when it came to schooling and academics and teaching us things ... He always worked hard, but I never felt like work took priority over me ... I never felt neglected, like he wasn't giving me attention or supporting me (Participant 5, age 23).

Hence, for the 12 participants who recalled their relationships with fathers prior to the separation, half perceived fathers as supportive and actively involved, and the other half perceived fathers as absent or detached prior to the separation. Some participants acknowledged fathers' working commitments as impacting on their ability to be attentive and involved in daughters' lives. For a few participants, however, this did not affect his level of commitment to the relationship. For others, even when fathers were physically present they were perceived as inattentive, and as adopting a minimal role in parenting.

## Relationships with nonresidential fathers during childhood and adolescence

This section presents the thematic analysis of data pertaining to participants' relationships with nonresidential fathers during childhood and adolescence. The data presented for this thematic analysis is organised into two themes, 1) supportive experiences of relationships with nonresidential fathers; and 2) difficult experiences of relationships with nonresidential fathers. Within these themes, data is further organised into two categories, 1) characteristics of the relationship with fathers and 2) contextual experiences that impact on the relationship. Each category contains two or more sub-themes, relating to aspects supporting and hindering daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers.

It is important to note that only three of the 16 participants described consistently poor relationships with their fathers, and two described consistently close relationships. The remaining 11 participants described relationships characterised by both positive and negative aspects. Three participants described mainly difficult or distant relationships with some positive experiences, four described mainly positive relationships with some negative experiences, and five described experiences that were equally positive and negative in nature. For ease of reference, themes will be discussed within the above categories and quotes from participants are provided to illustrate themes. These themes are presented below in Table 2.

**Table 2: Supportive and unsupportive experiences**

<b>Supportive experiences</b>	<b>Unsupportive experiences</b>
a) Supportive experiences within the relationship	a) Unsupportive experiences within the relationship
i) Fathers' support and active involvement	i) Lack of fathering
ii) Ease of communication	iii) Communication difficulties
b) Supportive context	b) Hindering context
i) Supportive relationships with father's partner	i) Mother's personal problems and stepfather interference
ii) Extended family	ii) Unresolved separation issues
iii) Mother's support for contact	iii) Father's new partner and stepfamily
	iv) Practical barriers to contact

## Supportive experiences

### *a) Supportive experiences within the relationship*

When asked about their relationships with fathers, ten of the sixteen participants (63%) discussed supportive aspects of their relationships with fathers. These participants described how they experienced fathers as supportive, interested, and actively involved in their lives and how they appreciated the ease they experienced in communicating with fathers.

#### *i) Fathers' support and active involvement*

Nine participants (56%) perceived fathers as interested and actively involved in aspects of their lives following the separation. Fathers were described by these participants as, 'fun', 'loving', 'encouraging', 'comforting', 'interested', 'affectionate', or 'understanding'. Participants appreciated when fathers actively facilitated visitation by living in close proximity, providing a welcoming home environment or engaging in supportive parenting practices. Participants described how fathers showed an interest and were actively involved in their schooling and extra-curricular activity. One participant whose parents separated during childhood, talked about how her father continued to be supportive, actively involved, and easy to relate to.

I could tell him anything ... He is so easy going and easy to relate with. He is really patient, yeah like he started teaching me to drive in my teens, and I really sucked, and then he tried to teach me the guitar and I sucked even more but he didn't give up. He has always been helpful academically too like when we were little he would read to us lots and help with homework and even now if I am struggling with an essay I can call him and he will help me with it. Cause he is really intelligent and reads lots of books (Participant 23, age 18).

Another participant whose father was living overseas talked about always feeling loved and valued which she attributed to his expressions of love, interest and effort to make their time together special.

When we visited he was very loving and doting and wanting to do things with us all the time ... he just wanted to show us that he wanted to be with us and have quality time ... I just always felt that he loved me. He always really stressed that in the letters he wrote, the phone calls and time he gave us when we visited (Participant 46, age 21).

#### *ii) Ease of communication*

Seven of the ten participants who had some supportive experiences described how they felt at ease around fathers, with some attributing the same to the father's approachability and open communication in the relationship. One participant who described a consistently close

relationship with her father described ease in communicating with him, attributing the same to his more relaxed approach.

I would probably feel comfortable talking to him. I don't think he would lose the plot, whereas Mum sort of got tempered. So I felt like I could talk to him about some things (Participant 48, age 25).

Others discussed how shared interests and similarities in personality and values with fathers contributed to closeness in the relationship. Some talked about sharing interests with fathers in various recreational activities. Another participant, who described a consistently close relationship with her father, talked of how a shared passion for knowledge and similar sense of humour contributed to her enjoyment in spending time with her father, and contributed to overall closeness in the relationship.

Um I remember like him, I liked reading and learning general facts so I can remember him giving me this book that had all the details about countries and I learned it ... We'd also watch who wants to be a millionaire ... We also went candy shopping a lot. He liked sugar just like me so we enjoyed kind of arguing over which is better and that kind of stuff ... We've always had a similar sense of humour. We can laugh at the same things (Participant 43, age 19).

Thus, participants appreciated when fathers were involved following the separation. This was characterised by father interest and active involvement in daughters' lives, affection, openness, and approachability. Some participants also thought that having similar interests with fathers contributed to closeness in the relationship. However, one father living in another country was also able to engender feelings of closeness through attention and verbal expressions of love and caring.

### ***b) Supportive contexts***

In talking about relationships with their fathers, 12 participants (75%) discussed the context in which contact occurred, describing how positive relationships with fathers' partners supported contact, how contact with fathers provided an opportunity to spend time with extended family, and how mothers' support for contact assisted in closeness with fathers.

#### *i) Supportive relationships with father's partner*

Five participants talked about some aspects of positive relationships they had with fathers' partners. These participants talked of periods where they experienced stepmothers as fun and supportive. Some also described how they perceived their stepmothers as key in providing a more homely and welcoming environment to visit. As discussed by two of the participants,



She was really good actually in terms of that sort of stuff. Every Saturday morning, dad would do the garden and Sally would do the housework. We'd always put grease on the LP, and her and I used to dance around and sing to that and stuff, which was always quite fun you know, while she was doing the ironing and housework and stuff and I was playing and stuff ... she was always um, a lot more easy going (Participant 36, age 30).

I've always got on well with my step mum. She was always the kind of person where I could ask her anything or talk to her about pretty much anything (Participant 40, age 30).

One participant reported that after she moved in with her father and stepmother, the family attended family counselling to work through the daughters' issues to assist with the family's adjustment to their new lifestyle.

My dad, stepmother and I ended up going to counselling as a family and we worked through a lot of things that way ... She [stepmother] was really good, if I was upset at my mum's I would be able to call her and she would talk to me on the phone and help me and everything (Participant 2, age 26).

#### *ii) Extended family*

Five participants (31%) thought that spending time with their fathers provided an opportunity to spend time with the extended family. These participants appreciated time with the father's family and for some participants this was just as important as time with the father. One participant, whose visits with her father routinely included visits with her uncles and aunties, described how she enjoyed spending time with cousins and felt connected to her family.

He would pick me up and he would take me straight to the next town where his brothers lived and we would do the rounds of my three uncles, so I would go and see my aunty and she had two daughters who were older than me so I would play round in the garden and play with the girls' toys so I always liked going to see them ... yeah and because we were very close with his family we'd spend a lot of time at his family home (Participant 46, age 21).

#### *iii) Mother's support for contact*

Two participants (13%) described how mothers had supported and facilitated contact with fathers, either through encouraging fathers to be more involved or by attending the visits with daughters. As one daughter described,

Every Sunday he would come and spend the afternoon with both of us and this was I think mostly my mum saying you need to have contact with her, we should try and do something together (Participant 51, age 18).

Hence, some stepmothers were at times experienced as supportive, providing a welcoming environment for daughters to visit, and contributing to daughters' sense of belonging in the

stepfamily unit. Other participants talked of their appreciation for the opportunity to spend time with extended family, and two acknowledged their mothers support in facilitating contact with fathers.

## **Unsupportive experiences**

### *a) Unsupportive experiences within the relationship*

At different points of the interview 14 participants (88%) talked about difficult aspects of their relationships with fathers. These participants described difficult or unsupportive interactions with fathers, which for some contributed to their reluctance to be in contact with fathers.

#### *i) Lack of fathering*

Nine participants (56%) described periods in which they perceived a lack of practical or emotional support from fathers following the separation. For some, this experience occurred immediately following the separation. For others, a perceived lack of support by fathers occurred periodically or consistently in the years following separation. Some participants reported feelings of rejection, insecurity, and reluctance to be in contact due to fathers' perceived lack of care. One participant whose parents separated when she was three years old talked about an experience as a child where she felt unwell and perceived her father as unhelpful and unsupportive.

I remember having to stay at his place every second weekend, and feeling sick one day, and he told me to go to bed, and I was crying and I didn't want to go to bed. And he said look just go to bed, if you're sick, go to bed. So I went and lay down on my bed, and then I went, oh I'm going to be sick. And I vomited all the way up to the hallway, until I got to the bathroom, by the time I got to the bathroom I had finished vomiting, and he was really pissed [angry] (Participant 36, age 30).

Some participants attributed their perception of fathers' lack of care and support to fathers' personal problems such as alcohol problems, mental health issues, financial difficulties, and fathers' inability to provide a secure home environment. One participant said,

My dad moved out into a few different houses and had different girls all the time and was never financially stable but mum would come over and we'd have no food and she'd just fill up the fridge ... Yeah. It was a crappy house, the floors were all crooked, you walked through the lounge and it was downhill but he was, he didn't really pay much attention to his job or anything. I remember one time he got an eviction notice in the mail and I saw it and my dad said oh no its nothing and I think his wife's parents are quite well off, bailed him out or something ... dad wasn't good enough with money and you know, there was never much food in the house (Participant 22, age 20).

Another participant, in talking about visits with her father described how her father would leave her in the car while he was socialising.

On occasions we would go out and he would go drinking and I would sit in the car ... I'd sit in the car for hours and wait for him (Participant 9, age 28).

Others attributed their perceptions of the father's lack of care to his lifestyle changes following the separation, including meeting new partners and starting a new family. One young woman described her perception that her father had lost interest in her life after having children with his partner, demonstrated by his failure to initiate contact or notice changes she had implemented in her life.

My stepmother got pregnant around then, so yeah that's when you know I was the one who had to phone up all the time to arrange things, my dad has never really called you know ... he would never make arrangements to see us (Participant 21, age 30).

*ii) Communication difficulties*

Thirteen participants (81%) described difficulties in communicating with fathers. All participants in this group described periods of superficiality and awkwardness in relating to fathers. For some participants, superficial communication was maintained in an attempt to avoid conflict with fathers. As one participant said,

Everything was sort of kept very shallow and light hearted, small talk. If it got any further than that it always erupted into a big argument, so superficial yeah, not wanting to say the wrong thing (Participant 22, age 20).

Others talked about their inability to relate conversationally to fathers. Participants attributed this to differences in interests particularly during adolescence, unfamiliarity due to inconsistent contact, and an inability to talk about difficulties experienced in living with mothers. One participant talked of her difficulties relating to her father which she attributed to different interests.

We would meet up in person... I never phoned him, I wouldn't know what to say to him. I could talk to my friends on the phone for hours about utter crap, but I couldn't ring dad. Also too dad is an academic, and he talks a lot in his day to day life about his job... talking about financial this and that, and as a teenager I just wanted to laugh and have some fun and think about other things (Participant 12, age 27).

Eight participants described experiences of being in conflict with fathers. They attributed conflict to fathers' criticism of and attempts to control their lifestyle choices, behaviour and

contact arrangements. Some participants also discussed their frustration with their father's criticism of family members, especially the mother and how this contributed to conflict in the relationship. One participant who engaged in frequent conflict during contact with her father said,

Yeah, yeah I'd go over everyday sort of thing but yeah we did fight a lot ... I guess it was the religion first of all and we'd fight and fight and fight ... I think money came into it a little bit later ... and then we fought about the family situation and later on about money on top of it, so yeah there's been a lot of fighting (Participant 42, age 18).

Another participant described how she experienced her father as very critical of her academic and extra-curricular achievements.

No matter what I did I was never ever good enough, you know, if I got A's I wasn't good enough. I started playing soccer and I was really excited, I got in the Senior B's and he said to me, oh why aren't you in the Senior A's or whatever the first division, or whatever the hell it was called ... it didn't matter what I did, it was never good enough (Participant 36, age 30).

Two participants described fathers' adoption of a disciplinarian role, with mothers calling on fathers for support with discipline and control. These participants formed negative associations with fathers as experiences were not balanced with more positive interactions. As one participant described,

During my teenage years, my Dad was involved in the discipline. My mum would call on him to help her to deal with us as teenagers, just because she was struggling. We gave her a bit of grief and she just needed that support ... It was awful, mum would be angry, and he'd come around and he'd lay down the law kind of thing. She would call on him and she needed him to do it, because we were probably out of line, but my memories are that he would come in, if it was serious my Dad would come in (Participant 48, age 25).

Hence, these fathers were experienced as unsupportive when they were perceived as not providing adequate emotional, practical or financial support for daughters. Some relationships with fathers were perceived as superficial while others were characterised by conflict. A few participants talked of disappointment in what they perceived as their father's criticism of them. Some participants perceived a significant deterioration of relationships with fathers after the separation, and for others the separation exacerbated the distance in the relationship they had always had with fathers.

### *b) Hindering context*

Relationships with fathers were also negatively affected by experiences external to the relationship. These included difficulties with mothers and stepfathers, unresolved separation issues, problems with stepmothers, and practical problems that impacted on relationships with fathers.

#### *i) Mother's personal problems and stepfather interference*

Nine participants (56%) talked about difficulties in their relationships with mothers, and the impact on relationships with nonresidential fathers. Some talked of the mother's personal problems negatively affecting their wellbeing and limiting relationships with nonresidential fathers. One participant talked of her difficult home environment while living alone with her mother describing how she felt unable to talk about these problems with her father due to pressure from her mother, which in turn contributed to feelings of disconnection with her father and reluctance to visit him.

Um my mum from when I was [young] she was addicted to drugs and [other issues] ... she said if you tell your dad what I have done then they will take you away from me ... I won't be able to cope ... I mean she had lots of secrets, with everything she did there was always the message don't tell cause they will take you away from me ... So by the time I was 14, I just felt so disconnected to my father. I didn't go unless I had to and I realise now that was cause dad didn't know what was going on in my life, and I couldn't relate to him on that personal basis ... It wasn't that he wasn't dependable, or unwilling or unable in fact he was willing as a father, I just didn't know how to take it. (Participant 12, age 27).

Six participants (38%) perceived that stepfathers directly or indirectly created barriers to contact with fathers, by refusing or controlling contact with fathers. As one participant explained,

My stepdad was quite controlling and he had a real power thing, like I wasn't allowed to call my dad 'dad' and during the custody thing, dad would try to see me and he would have all his friends on the front lawn saying you can't come in. Dad would have to get the police so he could see me ... He would also tell me, "Your dad doesn't want to see you" and would try to make me not want to go (Participant 2, age 26).

Interestingly, for a few participants barriers placed by stepfathers on relationships with nonresidential fathers indirectly contributed to closeness in the nonresidential father-daughter relationship. As one participant stated,

Since mum's boyfriend was trying to get me to see him [nonresidential father] less, then mum would kind of side with him and it would end up happening, but then it ended up being more of me and dad against mum

and her boyfriend as a result, like a reverse to what I think they wanted (Participant 43, age 19).

Hence, some participants perceived that their mother's repartnering had negatively impacted on their relationship with fathers, particularly when stepfathers were perceived as controlling. However, for a few participants, these restrictions contributed to closeness between daughters and nonresidential fathers. Others attributed difficulties in developing close relationships with fathers to difficult experiences with mothers, particularly when they were unable to be open and honest with fathers about what was going on for them.

*ii) Unresolved separation issues*

Ten participants (63%) described how ongoing issues between parents following the separation had impacted on their relationships with nonresidential fathers. Only one participant out of the 16 in this study described her parents' relationship as positive. Some participants discussed experiences of ongoing conflict and criticism between parents following the separation. They described how they felt caught in their parents' conflict. As one participant recounted,

Well it was quite horrid because you know they weren't very good about keeping things between them and not involving us. My mum was the one that said "I can't deal with your dad, you deal with him" and yeah at eight you don't know how to do that and my dad saying how bad my mum was ... So quite a bit of tension with being stuck in the middle (Participant 22, age 20).

Participants also talked of the distress they experienced when parents criticised each other, resulting in loyalty issues and in some instances prescribed contact or reluctance to see fathers. As one participant said,

I can remember not wanting to go. Definitely not wanting to go, he was good in the early days and after a little while, I have no idea how long he was awful he would say horrible things about mum, and that would make me really upset and that made me not want to go and spend time with him at all cause he would say "she's this, she's that" ... Yeah dad was really vocal about how he felt about mum and he was really horrible, like totally inappropriate things would be said. Whereas mum, yeah she would cry a lot but I don't think she would actually say anything (Participant 9, age 28).

One participant talked about her mother's resentment and open criticism of her father's new partner and stepparent responsibilities.

My mother had a lot of bitterness and liked to say bad things about my father and my stepmother and she would sow seeds inside me. I didn't recognise that was happening at the time of course, she'd say things and stuff and I'd start to take that on board, and some of the things that she

seemed to try and pass onto me, were along the lines of “You’re his daughter, they’re not his sons and he’s taking care of them, he’s not taking care of you”, which was preposterous (Participant 12, age 27).

Other participants discussed how mothers negatively influenced contact with fathers by creating barriers and becoming emotionally distressed while daughters were visiting fathers. One participant talked about a period following the separation when she believed her mother had sabotaged contact and negatively influenced her perception of her father.

Yeah it got to about a month before we would see him, cause mum would tell him not to come and then she would get us to pack our bags and leave us waiting for hours and then she would be like “Oh well that shows how much he loves you” (Participant 23, age 18).

Another participant talked about how she believed that her mother had created barriers to visitation with her father, and then was continuously in contact during the visits, which she found stressful.

Yeah a lot of mind games and making it difficult for me trying to arrange the trips to Wellington, purposely ringing me when I had just arrived there and saying how much she was missing me and getting me all agitated you know and feeling all worried about her you know. Maybe she was jealous or insecure that I was there, in some way, maybe she just wanted to feel some possession over me (Participant 12, age 27).

Hence, many participants believed that unresolved conflict between parents had negatively impacted their ability to form close relationships with their fathers. In particular, participants talked about being exposed to ongoing criticism between parents and the barriers they believed were created by mothers had negatively impacted their contact with fathers.

### *iii) Father’s new partner and stepfamily*

Eight participants (50%) described some difficult aspects of experiences with fathers’ new partners and new stepfamily situations. Some talked of how they perceived fathers’ partners at times as resistant to their contact with fathers. Others talked of feeling unwelcome in the family home. One participant described how she felt unwelcome by her stepmother and was unable to call her father ‘dad’ when around her half siblings.

My stepmum didn’t want us to go to their house ... She wasn’t really welcoming and was never really willing to help out or take us anywhere if my dad couldn’t, and we weren’t allowed to call him dad in front of their children ... and you’d feel that you had to be polite and that went on for a long time, therefore I didn’t want to be there (Participant 21, age 30).

Another talked about how she believed that her stepmother had created barriers to contact with her father by showing resentment towards her father and refusing visits to take place in the house.

For some reason his wife didn't like us and for many years after it was really hard to see him because he would be uncomfortable about seeing us because she wouldn't talk to him for quite a few days ... I was living in [another city] at that stage and I'd come down to visit him and had to meet him down the drive way ... it was quite distant for a few years there (Participant 13, age 30).

Hence, for some participants, fathers' repartnering appears to have negatively impacted closeness with fathers. Some stepmothers were perceived as creating barriers to contact, and for one participant lack of closeness in the relationship was further compounded by her perceived inability to acknowledge his father role around her new siblings.

*iv) Practical barriers to contact*

Eight participants (50%) talked about practical problems restricting contact with fathers. Some talked about the geographical distance between their own and their father's home. As one participant said,

Yeah then we moved too far away, to [another city], and we just got to see him every second weekend or we were supposed to, but got to see him less than that ... I remember really missing my dad a lot, getting quite upset about it (Participant 23, age 18).

Two participants also discussed how fathers' demanding work schedules restricted their time together, with fathers working long and unsociable hours, or in occupations that required a lot of travel. As one participant described,

Dad has always worked a lot. He's always been in catering and food so he's a kind of person who he would be up at six and gone at seven. He might come back at lunchtime and then go again for dinner sort of thing so ... on Saturdays often I'd get up early and we'd watch motor racing or something and then he'd go to work (Participant 40, age 30).

Hence, for some participants, contact with fathers was perceived as enjoyable, but the relationship became less close as a result of practical issues creating barriers to contact, such as geographical distance and fathers' demanding working schedules.

To summarise, participants discussed supportive and difficult aspects of relationships with fathers. Supportive aspects within relationships with fathers included fathers showing interest and being actively involved in daughters' care-giving, expressions of love and commitment



to the relationship, open and honest communication, and perceived non-judgmental regard from fathers. Contextual factors that were perceived as supportive to relationships with fathers included positive interactions with stepmothers and stepfamily situations, support from mothers for contact with fathers, and time spent with extended family.

Difficult aspects within relationships with fathers identified by participants in this project included unsupportive interactions with fathers, characterised by conflict, criticism, disinterest and overall lack of fathering. Difficult aspects, external to the relationship reported by participants revolved around daughters' relationships with mothers, parents' repartnering, unresolved separation issues, and practical barriers. Difficult relationships with mothers, stepfathers and stepmothers were perceived as having a negative impact on contact and closeness with fathers. Unresolved separation issues and associated inter-parental conflict contributed to daughters' feeling caught in loyalty conflicts and overall reluctance to be in contact with fathers. Finally, practical barriers including geographical distance and fathers' demanding working hours were perceived as significant barriers to contact, and in turn the quality of relationships maintained with fathers.

### **Current relationships with fathers**

This section presents the thematic analysis of data pertaining to daughters' current relationships with fathers. Similar to the section on daughters' relationships with fathers following the separation, the data here is categorised into two data sets, supportive and unsupportive experiences of relationships with nonresidential fathers. These data sets are further grouped into data relating to daughters' experiences of the relationship itself and aspects of the context impacting on the father-daughter relationship.

It is important to note that of the 16 participants involved in this project, six participants described close current relationships, four relationships were characterised by both positive and negative aspects, and six participants talked about poor relationships with fathers.

**Table 3: Supportive and unsupportive aspects of current relationships with fathers**

<b>Supportive experiences</b>	<b>Unsupportive experiences</b>
a) <i>Relating to father</i> i) Feeling cared for ii) Daughter's acceptance	a) <i>Relating to father</i> i) Communication problems ii) Loss of interest in daughter
b) <i>Supportive Context</i> i) Improved relationship with stepmothers ii) Daughter's independence	b) <i>Hindering Context</i> i) Practical barriers ii) Difficult relationships with stepmothers

### **Supportive experiences**

#### **a) *Relating to fathers***

##### **i) *Feeling cared for***

Nine participants (56%) talked of supportive aspects of the relationship they currently maintain with fathers. Some described fathers as affectionate and approachable, and some talked of their appreciation in being able to relate to fathers due to shared interests and perceived compatible personality. Some participants described how they felt comfortable talking with fathers, sometimes more so than with mothers. These fathers were described as easy-going and understanding. One participant, who described her relationship with her father as close, perceived her father as supportive and understanding and acknowledged the interests they share with one another.

It's weird because since I lived with mum, you're kind of naturally close to that person but I think if you measure closeness by how open you are to someone, I'm really close to dad because I mean I'll say things that most daughters wouldn't tell their fathers ... I can tell him any of my worries ... He has more realistic expectations of me like what I'm likely to do, what I'm not likely to do so I'm really open with him, have been and always will be ... Also we have shared interests. I see that I am a younger version of him (Participant 43, age 19).

Another described how she felt able to call on her father for support at anytime, recalling an experience where he had been approachable and supportive of her.

It's cool like even though he isn't around he is always there. Like if something bad happened I know that he would come down or something. Like when I got so drunk for the ball and I was so drunk that I was still drunk the next day. I was too scared to go home so he came all the way from his house to the train station to take me home ... He doesn't drive anymore so he had to catch a bus to come to me (Participant 23, age 18).

*ii) Daughter understanding and acceptance of father*

Six participants (38%) thought they better understood fathers as adults and had now come to accept past problems. They discussed how this understanding and acceptance had facilitated a closer relationship with fathers. One participant, who had not talked to her father for some time following an argument, talked about how she initiated contact and addressed issues in the relationship. She described how she understood and forgave what she perceived as her father's contribution to difficulties in the relationship, attributing the same to his difficult childhood experiences.

I think I got to the point of saying ... maybe I should make peace, I'm 18 you know, my dad's hopeless at relationships so why don't I have a go. Yeah so one night we had a conversation at the table, my dad, my step-mum and me. I don't remember what was said but we cried a lot and my dad finally managed to say something like I love you. Since then my relationship with my dad and step-mum has been a lot better ... I can forgive him for a lot of his actions cause of the way he was brought up ... yeah and I think you can't always expect the parent to be really strong (Participant 21, age 30).

Hence, these participants talked about being able to understand fathers better as adults, which contributed to closer relationships. For some, being able to address previous relationship issues with fathers as adults was helpful. For others, accepting their father's shortcomings' and choosing to move on from the past and focus on the future, was central to facilitating closer relationships with fathers.

***b) Supportive context***

*i) Improved relationship with stepmothers*

Three participants (19%) discussed how relationships with stepmothers had improved over time, which they attributed to maturity and understanding on both sides. These participants acknowledged how improved relationships with stepmothers had contributed to closer relationships with fathers and how they now viewed their fathers and stepmothers as a 'unit'. One participant who previously experienced difficulties in relating to her stepmother, particularly her restrictions on contact with her father, talked about how the relationship had improved through maturity, understanding, and communication. She described how she now felt more included in the family.

I think also I try, I don't dislike my step mum she's not that bad anymore, I think she was insecure that my mum would come back from overseas and take my dad back. Yeah I think that she grew up and I grew up and we just started communicating. I think it's just understanding, who they are ... It was only last year that they said to me, we are going to write a will to divide everything equally between the five of you, and we want you to be the executor. I was like wow they were now acknowledging that my brother and I were part of the whole family as well (Participant 13, age 30).

### *ii) Daughter's independence*

Three participants (19%) attributed improved relationships with fathers to their independence from mother's personal problems and difficulties with stepfathers, as well as decreased inter-parental conflict. One participant who earlier described her difficult childhood (being subjected to her mother's mental health issues and substance abuse, compounded by a perceived inability to access support from her father during this period) talked of becoming more independent from her mother, which enabled her to reconnect with her father, contributing to better understanding and closeness in the relationship.

Yeah so once I got out of that situation, I moved out of home and then re-evaluated everything, and felt empowered. And it occurred to me this is silly I have a perfectly great father and decided to get in touch with him, and it was all positive. I mean he had been there all along, but he was talking to a brick wall all those years. So then he came to [same city], and we would go have a drink in a bar together and we would go out for dinner and he became a great friend of mine, someone I would love having a good conversation with ... we would talk and talk and talk for hours, and slowly over a period over 3 years of just talking and getting to know each other again, it was just amazing. The relationship completely changed, and I got to know my father as he really is, not as I was told he is (Participant 12, age 27).

Hence, for some participants, independence, particularly separating themselves from mothers' issues and improved relationships with stepmothers, contributed to closer relationships with fathers.

## **Unsupportive experiences**

### *a) Relating to father*

Ten participants (63%) talked about difficult experiences in relating to fathers. Most in this group talked about difficulties at times in communicating with fathers, while a small number of other participants talked of the perception that fathers had lost interest in them. As mentioned previously, it is important to recognise that of the 16 participants in this study only six participants identified predominantly poor current relationships, six participants identified predominantly positive relationships, and the remaining four participants identified relationships characterised by both positive and negative aspects.

### *i) Communication problems*

#### **Superficial interactions**

Within the group of ten participants discussing unsupportive aspects in relating fathers, nine talked of superficiality in their interactions. These participants described conversations with fathers as superficial with contact often activity focussed. Only two participants expressed a

desire for more meaningful interactions, with the majority of this group appearing accepting of the superficial nature of their interactions with fathers. For some participants this more prescribed contact served to avoid conflict or awkwardness, and for others superficial communication was attributed to the fact that they had never perceived their relationship as close. One participant, who had never perceived a close relationship with her father, talked about how communication with her father continues to be superficial in nature.

He's not the sort of person I would sit down and tell all my problems to or get really in depth and stuff ... I probably would like him to an acquaintance or something or you know or a relative that you didn't know very well actually you know that sort of conversation ... I think our relationship will always be a bit strained because his personality and mine clash a little bit so conversations need to remain surface level (Participant 13, age 30).

### **Conflict**

Seven participants (44%) described some interactions with fathers as characterised by criticism and conflict. Some attributed conflict to personality differences, pressure by fathers to be in contact, fathers' erratic moods, and ongoing issues with the stepmother. Others perceived that feeling offended by fathers' inappropriate or critical behaviour triggered conflict in the relationship. Conflict in relationships with fathers often contributed to daughters' reluctance to remain in contact. One participant talked about her defensiveness concerning her father's criticism about their limited contact. She described feeling resentful at perceiving the relationship as distant since childhood, and attributed his desire for contact to his loneliness without a partner.

Dad at times gets a little bit disgruntled towards us kids because he didn't feel that we made any contact with him. I've always been very defensive and I sort of think that he shouldn't really be complaining about initiating contact ... And I just feel like he expected us to initiate contact when a tight sort of bond was never really formed, because of the lack of contact we had with him when we were growing up. So I've always been very defensive and I sort of think that he shouldn't really be complaining about us not initiating contact. It's only at times when he hasn't got a partner, probably because he's not as happy, that he notices more that you don't contact him (Participant 48, age 25).

Another talked about feeling frustrated by her father's behaviour and conflict during visits.

With my dad its always the same, I always look forward to seeing him and I miss him but then we meet up and sometimes its good, but generally it's not that great. I just come back from him in tears because we argue and he drives like a maniac ... he totally disregards my feelings (Participant 42, age 18).

Hence, some participants at times experienced difficulty communicating with fathers due to the perceived superficiality or critical nature of these interactions. According to daughters' reports, conversations were often superficial and prescribed in an attempt to avoid conflict or awkwardness in the relationship.

*ii) Loss of interest in daughter*

Two participants (13%) attributed difficulties in relating to fathers to their perception that fathers were not interested or willing to be involved in their lives. This was based on the perception that the fathers rarely initiated contact, showed lack of interest when conversing with daughters, and chose not to share important events occurring in their lives. As one participant said,

He never sent me photos. They apparently got married and they never even told me. I don't know if it's because we lost contact or if it's because he just lost interest in my life here because he wasn't a part of it. Well I sort of think I should do something, I don't really have a relationship with my dad but at the same time it's not really possible to have one. He's not willing and you can't really have a relationship with someone if they're not willing. It's hard because, well I guess I think that I should, but I don't get along with him. He doesn't care about my life here ... I'll call him on his birthday, Christmas and that will be it (Participant 22, age 20).

**b) *Hindering context***

*i) Practical barriers*

Six participants (38%) discussed how geographical distance between themselves and their father negatively impacted closeness in the relationship. Some talked about limited contact, while others described feeling forgotten by fathers. One participant who maintained a distant relationship with her father, who lived overseas, thought that geographical distance created little opportunity to develop a closer relationship with her father.

When I left at Christmas he cried, and my step mum said he didn't stop crying for ages and that's what makes me upset, you know that's what makes me feel a little bit emotional. It's the fact that we seem to be getting a better relationship over time and I do wish we did live nearer each other and we could see what could happen (Participant 21, age 30).

Two participants made reference to their busy lifestyles restricting contact with fathers. As one participant said,

We don't actually do things much. I mean I'm still planning to take him out to dinner but just don't know how to do that because I'm not as free in the evenings, with a part-time job and everything (Participant 43, age 19).

### *ii) Difficult relationships with stepmothers*

Finally, only one participant (6%) talked of her perception that her stepmother continued to restrict contact with her father, contributing to distance in the father-daughter relationship.

I think our relationship will always be a bit strained because his personality and mine clash a little bit and also because I still think his wife definitely controls his life and puts pressure on him to spend less time with me (Participant 13, age 30).

To summarise, participants described current relationships characterised by both supportive and difficult experiences. Supportive aspects of relationships with fathers included fathers' approachability and affection, as well as shared interests and compatible personality styles. Some participants also described how better understanding and acceptance of fathers had contributed to closer relationships. Contextual factors supporting adult daughters' relationships with fathers included improved relationships with stepmothers as well as independence from mothers' problems and ongoing separation issues (inter-parental conflict). Difficult or unhelpful aspects within relationships with fathers identified by participants included superficial and conflictual communication with fathers, and for two daughters, the perception that fathers had lost interest in them, which was demonstrated by lack of father-initiated contact and perceived lack of interest about daughters' lives when in conversation. Unhelpful contextual aspects perceived as creating barriers to adult daughters' relationships with fathers mainly concerned geographical distance. A few described how their own busy lifestyle had contributed to less father-daughter contact, and one discussed how continued difficulties with her stepmother had contributed to distancing in the relationship with her father.

## **Fathers influence on daughters' wellbeing and functioning**

Towards the end of the interview participants were asked how they perceived fathers had influenced the way they see themselves as a person and as a woman. Participants described how they perceived that interactions with fathers had influenced their confidence, self-esteem, and their experience of relationships, both social and intimate. They also talked about perceived similarities and differences in their values and interests to that of their fathers.

### **Sense of self-concept**

#### *Confidence/self-esteem*

Four participants (25%) discussed how interactions with fathers had positively contributed to their self-esteem and confidence, in particular, fathers' affirming behaviour and interests, or

values shared with fathers. One participant who described a consistently close relationship with her father, talked about how her father's support, affirmations and, evidence-based compliments had positively contributed to her self-esteem.

I find with dad and my identity is that I'm daddy's little girl. He compliments, oh you're beautiful, oh you're smart and then when I get crying about a guy he'll kind of assure me and just say oh it will be fine. He can actually back it up with some evidence, the compliments that he'll give me when I've broken up with a guy or when I'm feeling down. So I find that has helped me with my self-esteem (Participant 43, age 19).

On the other hand, three participants (19%) talked about interactions with fathers contributing to low self-esteem and low confidence, where they questioned their sense of judgement and personal value. One participant talked about her perception that her father's ongoing criticism over the years had contributed to her self-doubt and low confidence, and had only improved by creating distance from him.

Yeah and just the way I was when I was there, the way he made me feel I just turned into always second guessing myself and I didn't feel like I could do anything and I didn't really recognise myself, I'm not like that now that I have had some space from him, but back then I turned into someone else (Participant 22, age 20).

### **The importance of values and interests**

Four participants (25%) talked about how they appreciated particular values and interests they shared with their fathers. One participant who described both positive and negative aspects in her relationship with her father, talked about how she shared values with her father and how experiences with her father had influenced her.

Pretty much his attitude, he has always been positive and loving, and he is quite down to earth. His basic motto of life is pretty much the same as mine which is that happiness is the main thing. Like, other things don't really matter unless you're happy, which is really important like um just loving and caring with others. So those characteristics of dad have pretty much come down to me too. He's pretty philosophical really, and I can be too. My relationship with my dad has really modelled me. I draw on my experiences from him (Participant 2, age 26).

Another participant spoke of sharing less desirable traits with her father including being 'bossy and having problems forming attachments'.

Conversely, two participants (13%) talked about how their values differed or arose from negative experiences with their fathers. One spoke about how she strongly valued honesty,



which she attributed to her father's dishonesty, including the negative impact this had on his relationships with her and other family members.

Well, honesty I suppose is a fairly obvious one. I guess I felt a lot of my life that [father] wasn't being honest with me whereas on the other hand I had my mum who very much was. I know a lot about her past. Pretty much everything that I know about kind of the time around what happened, the separation and everything I've known from her or from my granny... I knew nothing about him really except from what my granny had told me about him except for the occasional little thing I guess so I guess seeing how badly that relationship had gone I put a lot of that down to his dishonesty and what he had never told me so I guess that's why I value that one so much (Participant 51, age 18).

## **Experience of relationships**

### ***Peer relationships***

Seven participants (44%) thought that relationships with fathers had influenced their social relationships. Three described how in response to difficult relationships with fathers they now presented a social-self that differed from their true-self, in order to protect their vulnerability, including fear of judgment, and poor self-esteem. One participant who previously described her relationship with her father as characterised by criticism and rejection, talked about how she presented herself as outgoing and superficial in order to protect her more vulnerable sense of self.

People think I am quite bubbly, but that's sort of more of a, you know, external show really, so that I don't have to necessarily show what I'm feeling or who I am. I'm usually probably quite superficial, I guess more as protection than anything you know. Cause, you know, if your own father doesn't love you, you've got to be pretty messed up right, so yeah (Participant 36, age 30).

Four participants discussed how they avoid or struggle with unresolved conflict in relationships. Two attributed this to their sense of loss when their fathers left, one attributed the same to the distress they experienced in witnessing their parents' conflict prior to the separation, and one attributed this to her father's physical and emotionally abusive behaviour. One participant, who described her experience of witnessing altercations between her parents prior to the separation and criticism she received from her father as a child and adolescent, talked about how she avoided conflict with significant others for many years.

I guess I'm maybe not as confident. I shy away from any type of confrontation maybe. I have two different ways. I have my personal life and my work life. When its work, I'm totally different than when it's my own personal situation. So yeah I don't like confrontation (Participant 9, age 28).

### *Intimate relationships*

Six participants (38%) discussed how relationships with fathers had influenced their attitude and behaviour within intimate relationships. This included always being attracted to older men, difficulties trusting in relationships, or seeking male attention. They sometimes attributed this to a perceived lack in attention received from fathers during their childhood and adolescence.

### *Collecting father figures*

Two participants discussed how they were attracted to older men, which one attributed at least in part to her father's absence and the other attributed the same to looking for similar characteristics in men to that of her father. One participant, who experienced both positive and negative experiences in her relationship with her father, described how she is attracted to strong men, and how her first relationship was with a man seventeen years older, providing her with a sense of security.

Well my first relationship with was a guy 17 years older than me. And everyone was saying, that's cause you're looking for a father figure. So maybe cause he provided security in every sort of sense. He was very secure, financially and emotionally, he was very settled, and I suppose I liked the feeling (Participant 5, age 23).

Although not related to intimate relationships, interestingly two other participants talked about collecting father figures in a more social sense, either through the church or in work settings. As one young woman said,

Yes one of the things I started doing is I collected father figures as well. I've always found it easy to be friends with older men like you know fifties and up. I had a couple of work dads at one point and then I had to change jobs or something and there was another one on the horizon. I don't know whether they try and collect me or I was collecting them ... Yeah there's one guy that I used to work with that I'm still in touch with and he likes to know that I'm under his wing because he found out about all my rubbish family history and he's been quite supportive throughout. He treats me like a daughter (Participant 40, age 30).

### *Trust: needing to be in control of partners*

Six participants perceived that they had become less trusting of men due to previous negative experiences with their fathers including alcohol and physical/emotional abuse, and witnessing their father's infidelity. In some cases this contributed to the daughter's reluctance to enter intimate relationships. One participant who described feelings of abandonment by her father following the separation talked about her reluctance to enter into intimate relationships.

Maybe just that it did influence me in that I didn't want to find a partner. Like the whole you know going through college and stuff and even when I met [partner] I didn't want to go out with him ... I think it was because um, I felt very loved by my father but then again I didn't feel like I wanted to be close to anybody because they might leave, because of the separation maybe um I wasn't thinking that consciously but I felt very let down by men in particular by my dad, um even though he did make me feel loved there was still you know that thought you know that we were here and that he'd gone (Participant 46, age 21).

### *Seeking male attention*

Two participants talked about how they flirted with men and sought male attention. They attributed this behaviour to the perception that they had received limited attention from fathers during childhood. As participant described,

I did go through a period between the ages of umm late teens to early 20's maybe, around the beginning of my relationship with my partner of just really being flirtatious, umm I think I needed to somehow prove something to myself that I was appealing. Just wanting to see that I'd get attention, cause I think that was something in my childhood that I didn't get so then at that stage of my life I think that was something I needed (Participant 12, age 27).

To summarise, participants perceived two broad areas of personal wellbeing and functioning that relationships with fathers had influenced. First, their sense of self and second, their relationships both peer and intimate. First, some participants talked of how interactions with fathers had positively and negatively contributed to their confidence and self-esteem, and how they had similar or different values from fathers. Second, others talked about how negative interactions with fathers had influenced how they behaved socially, describing difficulties with conflict, resulting in their sensitivity to others judgment and avoidance of confrontations. Three described how they presented with a social self, masking their more vulnerable self. Finally, some participants described how they perceived that relationships with fathers had influenced their intimate relationships. Some talked of their preference for older, more secure partners, while others discussed how they needed to be in control of partners due to ongoing trust issues.

### **Advice to fathers**

Participants were asked at the end of the interview what advice they would give to fathers separating. Two themes were derived from participants' responses, pertaining to father involvement and co-parental relationships following the separation.

## **Being involved**

All sixteen participants talked about the need for fathers to continue to be present in daughters' lives following the separation. As participant stated,

I think it's a real shame that some girls like me grow up without a dad because you actually need the influence and I really missed it in my life (Participant 42, age 18).

For a majority of participants in this study, 'being present' encapsulated frequent and regular contact with daughters, taking an interest, ensuring daughters feel valued, and maintaining active involvement in daughters' lives. One participant talked of the need for fathers to initiate regular phone contact even if daughters are not present to receive the call.

I think contact is a big thing. I think even if it's just a phone call, I think for a while just get into a habit of calling every night or every second night and if they don't answer the call or are out with their friends, at least they know you called, I think it's just making the conscious effort to be in contact (Participant 13, age 30).

Another talked about fathers maintaining regular contact, showing an interest, and trying to remain actively involved in daughters' lives.

I think that when they aren't there then call them, just to say how was your day, not every single day maybe, but just when they can, spending time with them in terms of doing things, showing them, you know, maybe for example just with a job, whatever the father does, giving the child an interest in it, showing them something, teaching them something, how to ride a bike, whatever, just things of quality that they would had done if they had still been in a relationship, as a father, what they feel counts (Participant 8, age 27).

Participants also described the need for fathers to remain 'child focussed', being aware, sensitive, and sometimes patient to the child's needs in the relationship. For one participant, fathers' patience in relation to the pace in which the father-daughter relationship developed was important.

Be aware that sometimes you're not going to get the ideal relationship initially and if you have a tiny little relationship that's something, and to actually give the person a little bit of space if they need it. You may be expecting too much, she may only be able to give a little and she's your daughter, so by that fact alone a relationship exists she doesn't have to do anything the relationship exists on that fact (Participant 5, age 23).

For another participant focusing on the child's needs in the relationship over personal issues was important.

Make it about the kids and not about you, support your kids in what they want even if it hurts you maybe. Take an interest, if your kids aren't with you after separation it's important to maintain contact or keep an interest (Participant 22, age 20).

Being approachable, ensuring open communication with daughters, and where possible being their advocate, was also discussed. One participant reflecting on positives in her relationship, acknowledged how she felt able to openly communicate with her father, contributing to closeness in the relationship.

Well the best thing about the relationship with my dad is the closeness which is the result of me being able to be open with him. He told me I could tell him anything and also gives off that vibe too. He doesn't sound judgmental and as a result of that you get the idea that he's understanding you (Participant 43, age 19).

Another talked about how being approachable, supportive, and ensuring security and safety for children is essential.

Definitely stability, sensitivity and security that children can talk to you ... Making sure your child talks to you and trying to keep them safe. If it is possible to make a stand for them do so. Just loving your children and letting them know they are special and that they have somewhere to go if needed (Participant 2, age 26).

Finally, being affectionate with daughters and providing a secure welcoming environment for them to visit was seen as an important aspect of fathering by daughters. As one participant said,

Don't ever tell them that they're too big for cuddles (Participant 36, age 30).

### **Civil relationship with other parent**

Four participants (25%) made reference to the need for parents to maintain a civil relationship following the separation for the children. One participant acknowledged the impact of animosity between parents on children, discussing the need to be mindful regarding inter-parental behaviour while in the presence of children.

One of the most important things is even though you don't want anything to do with your ex per say you need to try to have a good relationship with them for your child's sake, it makes their lives so much easier. Make sure you don't fight and bicker around child, just be there for them together if possible, it's really hard but important for the child. Oh and don't put each other down in front of the child. Keep it civil, 'cause it's not the child's fault (Participant 2, age 26).

To summarise, all participants, when asked about advice they would give to fathers separating in relation to daughters, talked about the need to remain present in their daughters' lives, for most this included maintaining frequent regular contact, showing an interest, and continuing to be actively involved where possible in daughters' lives following the separation. Others talked about the importance of fathers remaining child-focussed, patient regarding the progress of the father-daughter relationship, and maintaining approachability, open-communication, and supportiveness in relationships with daughters. A quarter of participants also talked about the need for parents to maintain civil relationships with each other, being mindful of the negative impact of inter-parental conflict on children.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

The overarching aim of this thesis study was to investigate daughters' experiences of relationships with nonresidential fathers following parental separation, and daughters' perceptions of the impact of this relationship on their wellbeing. Second, this study aimed to investigate daughters' perceptions of the supportive and unsupportive aspects of relationships with fathers. Third, this study aimed to investigate contextual experiences that impact on the relationship, including other relationships within the separated family.

This thesis study which included a questionnaire project and an interview project is unique in that it investigated New Zealand young adult daughters' experiences of relationships with nonresidential fathers, a relationship for which there is little understanding, internationally. As discussed in Chapter One, family systems theory provides a useful framework in which to examine family functioning. It was originally developed to examine first marriage families (Minuchin, 1974), however, has also been recognised as helpful in investigating transitions in families post-separation (Madden-Derdich et al., 1999). The results from this study will be discussed within the family systems framework, according to four key subsystems of the separated family system: 1) the father-daughter relationship, 2) the mother-daughter relationship, 3) the co-parental relationship, and 4) the parents' new partner and stepfamily relationships.

### **Father-Daughter Relationship**

In reporting contact with nonresidential fathers in the first year following the separation, some participants described regular (weekly or fortnightly) contact with fathers. After two years post-separation, around one third of participants believed that contact was maintained or improved, and just under a half talked of deterioration in contact with fathers. The remaining participants described fluctuating contact with nonresidential fathers. Participants also described experiences within fathers' households that impacted on their feelings of closeness with fathers, including fathers' parenting approach, fathers' mental health, and the practical aspects that impacted on them.

### **Father's parenting approach**

Although most participants described both supportive and unsupportive aspects of relationships with nonresidential fathers in the years following parental separation, a key finding from both projects was that just over a half of participants' perceived losses in these

relationships, particularly in relation to contact, father involvement, and overall closeness with fathers. Some described relationships as transforming from father and daughter to one more characteristic of friends or distant relatives. They described interactions as generally activity-based, and conversations as superficial in nature. This finding is consistent with earlier research with children reporting activity-based interactions with nonresidential fathers and less emotional intimacy (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; Gillman & Way, 2000; Nielson, 2007; Noller & Callan, 1990; Roiter-Eash, 1997; Simpson et al., 1995; Sobolewski & King, 2005).

Other participants described relationships characterised by conflict or neglect, with some talking of the criticism, and at times hostility they received from fathers. Others described instances where they were left on their own for extended periods while in the father's care. Although not directly examined in the research literature, some studies with daughters have noted how poor communication with fathers, difficulties trusting fathers, and lack of affirmation and trust can result in daughters' feelings of betrayal and detachment (Nielson, 2007; Wallace, 2006).

Conversely, some participants appreciated their fathers' ability to remain present in their lives, showing interest, and maintaining active involvement. These fathers were described as emotionally supportive, easy to relate to, openly communicative, and approachable. When asked about advice participants would give to fathers separating regarding relationships with daughters, a majority talked of a need for fathers to remain present and active in daughters' lives, ensuring regular contact, demonstrating interest and active involvement, affection, affirmation, and open communication with daughters. They also suggested that both mothers and fathers remain child-focussed, and fathers in particular remain patient when the process of re-establishing closeness with daughters is slower than expected. This finding is also consistent with previous research findings, with participants describing father interest, affection, support, open-communication, and understanding as positive qualities of father-daughter relationships (Coley, 2003; Nielson, 2003; Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008). Researchers have suggested that where possible, fathers engage in authoritative parenting practices following the separation, providing both support and routine while children are in their care (Arditti & Prouty, 1999; Hetherington et al., 1998; Swinton et al., 2008).

As participants entered adulthood, they perceived that relationships with fathers continued to be important. Many participants identified the frequency of contact as important, although not essential to closeness. Fathers' interest, active involvement, and support were important to



the young adults. On the other hand, in the questionnaire study approximately three fifths of participants described difficult or distant current relationships with fathers, one fifth talked of supportive current relationships, and just under a fifth described a mixture of supportive and unsupportive experiences. These experiences were more evenly spread across the sixteen women participating in the interview project. Some participants attributed closer relationships to their increased understanding and acceptance of fathers. Others continued to experience superficial relationships, fathers' lack of interest, or fathers' critical communication styles.

These findings are consistent with previous research on adult child-nonresidential father relationships, identifying both close and distant relationships over time (Fabricius, 2003). They are also consistent with previous research that suggests current closeness in adult child-father relationships are influenced by the young adult's perception of father involvement, openness of communication, and perceptions of the father's understanding of children in the years following the separation (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Ardit & Prouty, 1999; Fabricius, 2003).

One third of participants also thought that their fathers' mental health problems, or alcohol and drug issues, contributed to difficulties with their fathers, with participants describing a lack of parental supervision and active involvement, and lack of care offered by fathers who had difficulty coping. Some participants also spoke of the dissatisfaction with the home situation that was provided by fathers and experienced as inadequate. This finding supports earlier research in which children discussed how their concerns over their father's distress following the separation (Smith & Gollop, 2001) and the father's inability to provide a secure home (Dowling & Gorell-Barnes, 1999; Taylor et al., 2001) contributed to their reluctance to be in contact with fathers.

Research suggests that many fathers find it difficult to remain actively involved and supportive of children while not residing in the same house (Arditti, 1992b; Arditti & Prouty, 1999; Bailey, 2003; Smyth, 2005; Leite & McKenry, 2002). These difficulties were also reflected in some of the participants' experiences in the current study. According to daughters' reports, just under two thirds experienced a deterioration in their frequency of contact with fathers following the separation, with just under a half of fathers perceived as abdicating from the parental role. One fifth of participants also described how practical barriers including geographical distance, fathers' working commitments and transitional living arrangements, and a lack of home situation provided significant barriers to contact and inevitably closeness in their relationships with fathers. In adulthood, these trends continued

with two thirds of participants describing a distant relationship with fathers. Geographical distance continued to provide barriers to contact with fathers during adulthood, as did daughters' busy lifestyles, however, these were not perceived by many participants as essential to close father-daughter relationships. On the other hand, one fifth of daughters reported good relationships currently. These were characterised by perceived father interest, emotional support and approachability.

### **Impact on daughters' current self concept and relationships**

Participants in the interview study were asked about their perceptions of the impact of relationships with fathers on the way they perceive themselves. Daughters described ways in which they perceived that supportive and difficult aspects of relationships with their fathers had influenced their self-concept and relationships with others well into adulthood. Firstly, some daughters discussed how supportive and affirming relationships had contributed to their increased self esteem and confidence, and for others, how fathers' criticality had contributed to lower self esteem, and difficulties in both peer relationships and intimate relationships. In particular, daughters described how their fear of criticism and abandonment had contributed to ongoing avoidance of conflict and superficiality in peer relationships and difficulties with emotional intimacy and trust issues in intimate relationships. A few daughters also described how they had sought out male attention, and been attracted to older men, which they attributed to the physical closeness missing with fathers in their childhood, due to his distance or absence. Secondly, some daughters said that they aspired to, or appreciated similarities in their values and interests shared with their fathers, whilst others described how they valued differences in their values with fathers or strived to change undesirable characteristics shared with their fathers.

These findings are consistent with earlier research suggesting links between fathering and daughters' developing concept of femininity (Naus & Scheffler, 1999) or androgyny (Silverman, 1997), their emotional development and self-esteem (Farb, 1999; Grimm-Wassil, 1994; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Naus & Scheffler, 1999; Wexler, 1996), and their adulthood interactions with men (Cangelosi, 1988; Gallagher, 2008; Naus & Scheffler, 1999). In particular, their seeking of male attention and physical closeness with men (Cangelosi, 1988; Hetherington, 1982), their preference for intimate partners, and comfort with emotional intimacy in these relationships (Cangelosi, 1988; Gallagher, 2008; Naus & Scheffler, 1999).

## **Mother-Daughter Relationship**

This section examines results pertaining to the impact of the mother-daughter relationship on the father-daughter relationship, in particular the mothers' parenting styles and mental health following the separation. The wellbeing of mothers appeared to influence both contact and closeness in some daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers in the interview study. A quarter of the participants in this study talked of difficulties experienced in living with mothers who struggled to cope following the separation, and how mothers' difficulties coping negatively impacted daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers. This finding is consistent with previous research that has identified a negative impact of mothers' difficulty coping post-separation on the nonresidential father-child relationships (Amato & Booth, 1997; Scott et al., 2007). Some researchers have concluded that inter-parental animosity often results in children feeling unable to talk about one parent in the presence of the other (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Rodgers & Pryor, 1998; Scrodt & Afifi, 2007).

## **Co-parental Relationship**

This section discusses results relating to the co-parental relationship post-separation and its impact on the father-daughter relationship. Following the separation, just over a third of participants in the study reported that conflict between mothers and fathers provided significant barriers for daughters' relationships with fathers. These participants described witnessing altercations and being subjected to ongoing criticism between parents, resulting in torn loyalty and associated distress. For some participants this contributed to their reluctance to be in contact with their fathers. Previous studies have noted children's distress in witnessing inter-parental altercations and denigration (Altenhofen et al., 2008; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Dunn, 2004; Hawthorne & Lennings, 2008; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Leite & McIntosh, 2005; McKenry, 2002; Peris et al., 2008; Waller & Swisher, 2006), and potentially the emotional parentification of the children, and triangulation, where fathers become outsiders in the separated family system (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Taylor et al., 2001).

Furthermore, a few participants said that their mothers had created barriers to contact with their fathers, which they attributed to ongoing acrimony between parents. For example, one participant reported that her mother cancelled contact with her father while leading the children to believe that their father had failed to arrive. This concept of 'gate-keeping', particularly gate-closing (Trinder, 2008), has been widely addressed in divorce research, with many fathers reporting distress in relation to mothers' restrictions to their contact with

children (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Hetherington et al., 1998; Lyons, 2006; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Manning & Smock, 2003; Pasley & Braver, 2004). Some researchers have also identified the ways in which mothers' attitudes and behaviours may facilitate closer nonresidential father-child relationships (gate-opening) through flexibility and at times facilitation of visitation with fathers, and willingness to engage in cooperative coparenting with fathers (King & Heard, 1999; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Seery & Crowley, 2000; Wolchik, et al., 1996). Although not common in the questionnaire study, two participants described more cooperative coparenting styles in the interview study. They described an appreciation for their mothers whom they perceived had put aside issues with the ex-spouse and encouraged fathers to initiate contact or attended outings with the father and daughter to support the relationship.

In discussing current relationships with fathers, some participants in the interview study attributed increased closeness in their adult relationships with fathers to their independence from their parents' conflictual relationship. These findings are consistent with previous research linking reduced inter-parental conflict (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Amato, 2005; Buchanan, et al., 1991) with improved adult relationships with fathers (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003). These findings also mirror research findings identifying the negative impact of a mother's animosity towards the father (Hoffman, 1995; Scott, Booth, King & Johnson, 2007), and associated triangulation (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Peris et al., 2008) on childhood and adolescent relationships with fathers.

## **Parental Repartnering and Stepfamily Living**

This study contributed to research investigating the entrance of parents' new partners and the direct and indirect impact of these relationships, particularly with stepmothers, on closeness in the father-daughter relationships. Results identified particular experiences with stepmothers and stepfathers perceived by participants as supportive and those experiences perceived as unsupportive.

### **Impact of stepmothers on nonresidential father-daughter relationships**

Just under half of all participants across the two studies reflected on how stepmothers had actively restricted contact with fathers. They described how some stepmothers created rigid boundaries around the father and themselves and their siblings, restricting visits to the family home, showing resentment to fathers following father-daughter contact, and in two instances

forbidding the father to acknowledge or name the father-daughter relationship while in the presence of half-siblings.

Most of the research investigating the stepmother-stepchild relationship has been carried out from the stepmothers' perspective, focussing on the ambiguity and challenges of the nonresidential stepmother role (Weaver & Coleman, 2005). The results from this study support earlier studies, where nonresidential stepmothers have expressed frustration in providing a part-time stepparent role (Weaver & Coleman, 2005), and in some cases resentment towards the stepchildren (Ambert, 1986; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). The results also mirror Crohn's (2006) study with adult participants who described positive relationships with stepmothers that were characterised by less control and more support.

A few participants also talked of their fathers' new responsibilities in relation to new partnerships, and children emerging from these partnerships, contributing to less time for father-daughter contact. These findings are consistent with previous research that has identified fathers who repartner and have children may struggle to remain actively involved in their nonresidential children's lives, dividing their attention and energy between the two households (Ahrons, 2006; Bradshaw et al., 1999; Dunn, 2004; Manning & Smock, 2003).

Other participants identified the contributions of fathers' new partners and stepfamilies to closeness in the nonresidential father-daughter relationship. These participants experienced stepmothers as warm, engaging, and providing a welcoming home environment for the participants to visit. Participants talked of appreciating the routine and support provided by stepmothers and how they valued relationships with their half-siblings or stepsiblings. This finding is supported by a small number of studies identifying improved relationships between children and nonresidential fathers who have repartnered (e.g., Aquilino, 2006; Cooksey & Craig, 1998). Moreover, a small number of studies with stepmother and stepdaughter participants have identified a variety of characteristics of stepmothering that is perceived as supportive to the stepmother-stepdaughter relationship. These include friendship, emotional and practical support, and mentoring (Crohn, 2006; Weaver & Coleman, 2005). However, as discussed by the stepmothers in Weaver and Coleman's (2005) study, it is important that the role and responsibilities of the stepmothers compliment both the expectations of other members of the stepfamily system and the stepmothers' personal beliefs if supportive stepmother-stepchild, and in turn, nonresidential father-child relationships, are to be maintained.

As participants entered adulthood, some perceived that relationships with fathers' partners continued to impact on relationships with fathers. A few participants attributed closeness with fathers to improved relationships with stepmothers, and attributed improved stepmother-stepdaughter relationships to a better understanding between stepmothers and daughters as adults, and resolution of old issues. Only one participant described how her difficult relationship with her stepmother continued to negatively impact her relationship with her nonresidential father. These findings are consistent with earlier research attributing stability and improvements in stepparent-stepchild relationships over time to an increased opportunity for children and stepparents to get to know each other (Ahrons, 2006; McDonald & DeMaris, 1996), and stepmothers' engagement in roles that support the adult-child-father relationship (Crohn, 2006). Other studies have found that although many relationships with stepmothers improve over time, for many adult children these relationships may remain superficial (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994; Stewart, 2005).

## **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations of this study. First as mentioned previously this research was carried out with a small group of women living in New Zealand. Furthermore, participants were predominantly university students, and were self-selected. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be considered to be representative of the New Zealand population. The participants were also predominantly of New Zealand European descent. Māori and Pacific Island families may possess different perspectives from that of New Zealand European families, and Māori and Pacific Island children may have alternative experiences and views in relation to fathers post-separation.

Second, the adult daughters participating in this study provided retrospective accounts of their childhood and adolescent experiences. These were used to better understand the development of the nonresidential father-daughter relationship. Although views of childhood experiences may change over time, it has been suggested that adult participants may provide more considered insights to childhood experiences (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002). However, perspectives also change across the years and this study reflects the perspectives of the participants at one point in time only.

Third, although the focus of this study was to investigate the father-daughter relationship from the perspectives of daughters, research with the daughters' fathers would have helped, offered another perspective, and contributed to a fuller understanding of this relationship.

Fourth, it is also important to acknowledge my role as researcher. As discussed in Chapter Two, the researcher is recognised as the primary research tool in qualitative research, and subjectivity is considered inherent in both the process of data collection and analysis (Casebeer & Verhoef, 1997; Merriam, 2002; Polkinghorne, 2006). In accordance with previous recommendations, efforts were made in this study to represent the data as validly as possible (Morrow, 2005). I engaged in regular consultation with my supervisor and a peer review was carried out on developing themes to ensure authenticity and credibility of the results. Despite these efforts, it is acknowledged that a different researcher may have identified slightly different themes or provided a different emphasis.

## **Implications for Future Research**

Although this study largely supports earlier research findings investigating the impact of parental separation on nonresidential fathers' relationships with children, it is unique in that the experiences in this study are from the daughter's perspective. This area of research is novel with little qualitative research available investigating children's experiences in relationships with fathers, and even less available investigating daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers, particularly within the context of New Zealand. Therefore, this study provides a platform from which further quantitative and qualitative investigation into daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers may be carried out.

Research investigating ethnic differences in daughters' experiences and perspectives of relationships with nonresidential fathers following separation would be valuable, contributing to our understanding of New Zealand nonresidential father-daughter relationships. In particular, studies investigating Māori and Pacific daughters' experiences. Future research with daughters from different socioeconomic groups would also be beneficial providing a broader understanding of this relationship.

A key finding in the current study was the apparent difficulty for some nonresidential fathers in providing supportive parenting for daughters. Research investigating fathers' experiences and perspectives of relationships with daughters are important. This would complement the current study by providing a fuller picture of the nonresidential father-daughter relationship and fathers' perceptions of the challenges they face in maintaining relationships with daughters from a separate residence. It may also assist to define the interventions or support needed by fathers to help them to provide the parenting that daughters need.

Another key insight arising from the results in this study was the impact of some mother-daughter relationships on relationships with nonresidential fathers, in particular, the impact of mothers' personal problems on daughters' openness and closeness in relationships with nonresidential fathers. Further investigation, into aspects of mother-daughter relationships that support and negatively impact nonresidential father-daughter relationships, would also be useful and would further contribute to our understanding of the intertwined nature of relationships in separated families.

Another area of interest that warrants further investigation is the impact of the nonresidential stepmother-stepdaughter relationship on daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers. A significant proportion of daughters in this study described the impact relationships with nonresidential stepmothers had on their relationships with fathers, for many unsupportive and for a few supportive. To date there is limited research available investigating the nonresidential stepmother-stepchild relationship, and even less investigating the impact of the nonresidential stepmother-stepchild relationship on closeness in non-residential father-child relationships.

Finally, it is reasonable to assume that boys and girls may have different experiences in relationships with nonresidential fathers following parental separation. This study investigated daughters' perspectives of their experiences in relationships with nonresidential fathers. Future research investigating nonresidential father-son relationships from the sons' perspective would also be beneficial, contributing to our understanding of the impact of parental separation on father-child relationships, and children's needs within these relationships.

## **Implications for clinical practice**

There are several important factors in this study that need to be considered by clinicians working with post-separation families. It is apparent from the results of this study that some fathers appeared to experience real difficulty in providing a secure home situation and adopting an active and supportive parenting approach. In terms of clinical implications, a key goal in working clinically with fathers could be to support them to engage in an active parenting role following parental separation, including the provision of a supportive home for children to visit. Previous literature and indeed the results of this study indicate that where possible an authoritative parenting style should be adopted by nonresidential fathers, characterised by parental warmth, support, open communication, interest, and flexible



discipline. Fathers could be encouraged to engage in daily routine (e.g., eating meals together, bedtime rituals) and recreational activities around the home during children's visits as these will promote routine and family cohesiveness.

Nonresidential fathers may also benefit from support in redefining and reframing their parenting roles, emphasising the importance of continued involvement with children following the separation (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Stone, 2006). Clinical interventions may be individualised, working individually with fathers, or in sessions, with both parents and the family as a whole. Alternatively, support for fathers may be carried out within the context of a psycho-educational support group.

Finally, assuming child safety, clinical interventions that focus on assisting separating parents to manage their coparenting relationship and alleviate practical barriers to father-child contact would also be beneficial. These barriers may include the practical difficulties of children moving between parents' houses, the geographical distance between parents, and transport issues (Bailey, 2003).

Clinicians could also encourage parents, where possible, to engage in cooperative coparenting that promotes nonresidential father involvement. Therapists could work with both parents where possible to assist parents to work through their differences (Bonach, 2007). Parents may also benefit from assistance in learning effective problem-solving skills to assist them in establishing a cooperative coparenting relationship characterised by effective communication and negotiations regarding parenting, visitation, and other important issues that arise, promoting child centred parenting and active involvement by both parents (Kelly, 2007; Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008; Ramisch et al., 2009). Finally, clinicians may also work with parents, providing a voice for the child, and encouraging parents to focus on the child's needs. In the case of children feeling pressured to spend time with fathers, clinicians may encourage father patience regarding the pace at which their relationship with the child develops following the separation (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003).

However, in situations where couple or family therapy is not possible, individual work with each parent or parent education and support groups may also provide opportunities to engage parents in effective post-separation parental planning, and, in turn, promote cooperative coparenting practices (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Kelly, 2007). Currently in New Zealand, with the introduction of the New Zealand Care of Child Act 2004, emphasis is placed on parents meeting the children's needs when negotiating care arrangements (Ministry of Justice, 2006). Parental involvement by both parents is encouraged, either through shared parental care, or in

cases where this is not possible, regular nonresidential parent-child contact. This current study supports the importance of ongoing efforts to provide separated parents with the support and education needed to assist them, and emphasizes the need for continued care of children and good quality relationships with both parents, if possible.

## **Conclusions**

Relationships with nonresidential fathers were important to the daughters in this study during childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. Some daughters described an appreciation for fathers who engaged in an active supportive parenting approach characterised by interest, active involvement, emotional support, and open communication. However, many daughters described unsupportive fathering practices characterised by superficiality and fathers' disinterest. When asked, daughters described the need for fathers to remain present in their lives where possible following parental separation and to be patient regarding the pace at which the relationship developed. Cooperative coparenting styles engaged in by separated parents were also appreciated by the small group of daughters in this study that experienced this. On the other hand, for others, inter-parental conflict appeared to negatively impact their relationships with fathers, with daughters feeling torn between parents when subjected to altercations, ongoing criticism, and perceived gate-keeping by mothers. This, in turn, contributed to more distant relationships with some fathers. When asked, many daughters discussed the need for parents to remain civil and at the very least not involve children in disagreements.

Father repartnering also appeared to impact nonresidential father-daughter relationships. Some nonresidential stepmothers were perceived as supportive by daughters, providing a welcoming home environment for daughters to visit. Other stepmothers were perceived to resent the father-daughter relationship and to create boundaries around themselves, the father, and their siblings. This resulted in daughters feeling excluded from the stepfamily system. Finally, practical barriers such as geographical distance, transient living arrangements and fathers working commitments were noted by some daughters as restricting contact with, and, in turn, closeness in relationships with nonresidential fathers.

These findings have implications for clinical practice with separating families. First and foremost, this study has identified the need for clinical interventions assisting nonresidential fathers to maintain a parental role with children after separation. Second, some separated spouses may benefit from assistance in resolving their differences and working together

cooperatively. Finally, in the case of father repartnering, clinicians may work with fathers and children, fathers and stepmothers, or stepfamilies as a whole to ensure all involved have realistic expectations of the transitional process, ensuring that children feel welcome and included in the family.

The current study has highlighted the need for future research investigating nonresidential fathers' experiences and perspectives of parenting, the impact of mother-daughter relationship on father-daughter relationships, and the impact of the nonresidential stepmother-stepdaughter relationship on daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers. Given the cultural diversity within New Zealand society, research into cultural differences in daughters' experiences of relationships with nonresidential fathers would also be worthwhile and would provide a more representative account of daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers.

Finally, although the focus of this study was to investigate daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers, the overarching goal of research in this area is to develop a better understanding of nonresidential father-child relationships and children's needs in these relationships. Therefore, future research investigating son's relationships with nonresidential fathers is also important.

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## APPENDIX A

### DAUGHTERS RELATIONSHIPS WITH NONRESIDENTIAL FATHERS FOLLOWING PARENTAL SEPARATION

**Directions:** Please fill in the questionnaire and post in the self-addressed and prepaid envelope provided as soon as possible.

There are no right or wrong answers for this questionnaire. I am interested in understanding your experiences and ideas.

It will take about approximately 20 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. Please answer all questions and post the questionnaire as soon as you have completed it. Thank you for taking part in this study.

*Please describe yourself, either by circling the most relevant option, or by filling in the blank spaces available.*

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Ethnic Group:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Relationship Status:**

1. Married
2. De-facto (living together but not married)
3. Long term relationship
4. Short term relationship
5. Casual relationship
6. Single
7. Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

**Education (highest qualification)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Employment:** (please state occupation and if full time or part time or please state if unemployed) \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Family History and Day to Day Care Arrangements**

*The following questions will be asking about your family and changes in living arrangements following your parents' separation.*

**Do you have any siblings? Y / N**

**How old were you when your parents first separated? (in years)** \_\_\_\_\_

**How long have your parents been separated? (years)** \_\_\_\_\_

1) Can you briefly describe the reasons why your parents separated?

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Did your parents have multiple separations? (separate, get back together and separate again) Y / N

If YES how many times did they separate and how old were you when they finally separated? \_\_\_\_\_

Did your mother repartner or remarry? \_\_\_\_\_

Did your father repartner or remarry? \_\_\_\_\_

**CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIP WITH FATHER**

*The following section is about your relationship with your father prior to, during and following your parents separation. Please feel free to use the other side of each page, if needed, to respond to the questions.*

**Which of the following options best describes contact with your father in the first year following their separation? (you may circle more than one option if it applies)**

1. 2-3 days per week
2. 2-3 days per fortnight every weekend
3. every second weekend for two days
4. every second weekend for a day
5. once a month for a weekend
6. once a month for a day
7. Less than once a month

















**Thank you for participating in this study. Your effort in completing this questionnaire is greatly appreciated.**

*Please check that you have answered every question and then return the questionnaire in the stamped addressed envelope. If you have any queries regarding completing the questionnaire please feel free to contact me at:*

*Nicky McCloud  
Psychology Department  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland  
Ph: 3737599 ext 84479*

**If you would like participate in the interview study, please fill in the following.**

**I would like to participate in an interview exploring more in-depth the relationship I had with my nonresidential father following my parents' separation.**

**My Contact Details Are:**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone** \_\_\_\_\_ **(home)**

\_\_\_\_\_ **(work)**

\_\_\_\_\_ **(mobile)**

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**The most convenient times for the researcher to contact me are:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Also if you know of any other women who fit the participant criteria, and may be keen to participate in this study, can you please forward them my contact details.**

# APPENDIX B

## **Participant Information Sheet**

**Project Title:** Daughters Relationships with Nonresidential Fathers Following Parental Separation.

**Researcher:** Nicky McCloud, Clinical Psychology Doctoral Student, University of Auckland.

**Supervisors:** Dr Claire Cartwright, Associate Professor Fred Seymour

### **To The Participants of this Study**

#### ***Who is carrying out the study?***

The study is being carried out by Nicky McCloud, a Clinical Psychology Doctoral student at the University of Auckland. This research will be carried out under supervision of Dr Claire Cartwright and Associate Professor Fred Seymour.

#### ***What is this study about?***

The purpose of this research is to investigate daughters' relationships with nonresidential fathers following parents' separation. This study aims to understand girls' experiences of relating to fathers following separation, and the things they liked about contact with fathers, and things that were difficult.

#### ***What will be required, and how long will it take?***

This research consists of two studies. The first is a questionnaire study. The second is a more in depth interview. It is estimated that approximately fifty young women will complete the questionnaire, and fifteen will take part in the interview. You are initially invited to participate in the questionnaire study, however may also volunteer to participate in the interview study if you so wish.

The questionnaire will take approximately twenty minutes to complete. The questionnaire will explore family history and day to day care arrangements, relationships maintained with both father and mother prior to, during and following the separation through to the present. And finally there will be some questions surrounding general wellbeing. Questionnaires will be sent out with an attached return address and stamped envelope so that they can be sent back. At the end of the questionnaire you will be able to indicate if you would like to consider taking part in an interview.

For those participating in the interview, the interview will take approximately 1- ½ hours to complete. Interviews will be audio taped however the tape may be switched off at any time if you require a break. Interviews can be carried out either in an office located in the university or at your home, depending on which is more convenient for you. The interview will focus on understanding the relationship you had with your father and how this developed and changed following parental separation.

#### ***What resources are available to you if you become stressed from issues brought up in the questionnaire or interview?***

It is possible that a participant taking part in the research, either questionnaire or interview, could feel upset or distressed talking about personal issues. After completing the questionnaire you are welcome to contact the researcher if you feel any stress during or following completion of the questionnaire and would like to discuss the same. At the end of the interview, there will be an opportunity to debrief any issues the process may have raised. In the case that you terminate participation, support (friend or parent) will be found for you. A list of agencies will also be available to you on completion of the interview, should you require any further support.

#### ***What happens to the information?***

All information supplied will be treated as confidential to the researcher. The questionnaire is anonymous. If you participate in the interviews your identity will remain confidential to the researcher. All consent forms will be assigned an identity code and locked in a filing cabinet. The corresponding audiotapes and the interviews transcribed from these audiotapes will be assigned the same identity code as the consent forms. After they are used, the audiotapes and transcribed

interviews will also be locked away in separate filing cabinets. Questionnaires, audio tapes and transcribed interviews will be stored at the University of Auckland for three years before being destroyed. You will be given the opportunity to have your audio-tape back after the study is complete, and may also receive a summary report of the findings if you wish it.

Every attempt will be made by the researcher to transcribe the audiotapes themselves. However in the event that this is not possible, a transcriber will be employed to assist. He or she will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. If the information you provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source.

***You may change your mind and withdraw from the study***

You may withdraw from the study at any time, and withdraw any information traceable to you up to two weeks after the conclusion of the interviews without giving a reason. You are under no obligation to participate. Participation is completely voluntary.

***If you have any questions about this research at any time, please contact:***

Nicky McCloud at the Psychology Department, University of Auckland. Private Bag 92019. Auckland or on 373-7599 Ext. 84479.

OR

Dr Claire Cartwright (Doctoral Supervisor), at the above address or on 373-7599 Ext. 86535.

OR

Associate-Professor Fred Seymour (Secondary Supervisor and Head of Psychology Department), at the above address or on 373-7599 Ext. 88414.

***For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact:***

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee,  
The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Tel: 373-7599 extn. 87830.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12 October 2005 For 3 years  
from 12 October 2005 to 12 October 2008 Reference Number 2005 / 387.

# APPENDIX C

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

### THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS

**Project Title:** Daughters' Relationships, with Nonresidential Fathers, During and Following Parental Separation

**Researcher:** Nicky McCloud, Clinical Psychology Doctoral Student, University of Auckland.

**Supervisors:** Dr Claire Cartwright  
Professor Fred Seymour

#### **To The Participants:**

I have read and I understand the Information for Participants sheet for volunteers taking part in this study designed to explore daughters' relationships with their non-custodial father during and following their parents' separation.

I understand that this study is voluntary and that I can withdraw from it at any time.

I understand that my questionnaire will be stored in a locked facility for up to six years, at which point it will be shredded.

I understand that my interview will be audio/digitally taped.

I understand that my interview may be transcribed by someone other than the investigators who has signed a confidentiality agreement.

I have had time to consider whether to take part and I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study.

- I wish to receive a written summary of the research findings YES/NO

If YES to the above, Address to be sent to: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name) hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Principal Investigator: Nicky McCloud

Contact Telephone Number: (027) 259 3991

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12 October 2005 For 3 years from 12 October 2005 to 12 October 2008 Reference Number 2005 / 387.

# **APPENDIX D**

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Interview**

The interview format will be explained to the participant including time and structure. I will explain to participants that the interview is an extension of the questionnaire, exploring their experiences in more detail. Prior to commencing the interview, consent form will be explained and signed by the participant and any questions the participant has will be addressed.

### **Personal Information**

The following personal information will be obtained from the previously responded to Daughters Relationships with Nonresidential Fathers Questionnaire. However if any information is missing from the questionnaire then I will ask the participant for the information.

- Participants Age
- Participants Ethnicity
- Siblings
- Participants Relationship Status
- Participants Employment Status
- Reason for the Separation
- Check that they lived with mum initially following the separation

### **Relationship with Father before the Separation**

Following the explanation of the interview process, clarification of any queries the participant may have and collection of personal details, participants are asked to recall their earliest memories of their father, describing their relationship and interactions with fathers. Questions are asked including.

*Can you tell me about some of your early memories of your father?*



*Can you tell me anymore about your relationship with your father before your parents' separation?*

## **Prompts**

If can't remember- too young to remember ask:

*What have you been told about your relationship with your father?*

If doesn't understand appear to understand the question, ask:

*Was he around?*

*How close were you?*

*What sort of things did you do together?*

*How did you spend time?*

*How involved was he in your care?'*

## **Relationship with Father during and in the years following the separation**

This section asks questions surrounding the participants' experiences of relationships with their father during and in the years following the separation. Participants' experiences are followed from childhood through adolescence into adulthood, exploring changes to the relationship and identification of both positive and difficult aspects of the relationship.

This section of the interview will begin with the question:

*What about during the separation... what was your relationship with your father like then?*

*And in the years following?*

## **Prompts**

*What was your relationship with your father like after the separation?*

*How often did you see him? Where did you spend time together? How did you spend time together?'*

*Any changes?*

*Positive aspects?*

*Difficult aspects?*

Participants are also asked about their general memories of the time, including whether mothers were supportive of time spent with fathers.

## **Current Relationship with Father**

This section of the interview explores daughters' current relationships with fathers, exploring the frequency of contact and nature of the relationship, perceived closeness, participants' needs in the relationship and aspects perceived as positive and those experienced as difficult.

This section of the interview begins with the questions:

*What has your relationship with your father been like in recent years?*

*What is the relationship like now?*

## **Prompts**

*Are you currently in contact?*

*How often do you see him?*  
*How do you spend time together?*  
*How close are you with your father?*  
*Positive aspects?*  
*Difficult aspects?*

## **Influence of Father on Identity**

This section of the interview explores daughters' perspectives of how relationship with fathers may have influenced their sense of self (self concept). Daughters are first asked to describe their defining characteristics:

*Some people may describe themselves as happy, easygoing, uptight or anxious, How would you describe yourself as a person?*

They are then asked:

*How do you think your relationship with your father has influenced the way you see yourself as a person/woman?*

## **Ending the interview**

To draw the interview to a close I will tell the interviewee that we are near the end of the interview and ask if they have any questions about the interview or if there are any experiences they would like to add that have not been covered in the interview and they think are important.

The interview closes with a question asking the interviewee what advice they would give to fathers following the separation, in relation to supportive aspects of relationships with daughters/children.

# APPENDIX E

## TRANSCRIBER'S CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY CONSENT FORM

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### THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS

Project Title: Daughters' relationships with Nonresidential Fathers during and following Parental Separation

Researchers Name: Nicole Laura McCloud, Doctor of Clinical Psychology student, The University of Auckland.

To: The transcriber.

I have been given the Participant Information Sheet and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. I understand that I am agreeing to cooperate with the researcher in maintaining the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of research participants.

- I agree to transcribe interviews from the Daughters' relationships with Nonresidential Fathers During and Following Parental Separation study
- I agree to treat all information from the interviews as private and confidential.
- I agree that if I recognise the person's voice or realise that I know their identity at any time during the transcription that I will cease listening to the tape and contact the researcher.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

(please print clearly)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12 October 2005 For 3 years from 12 October 2005 to 12 October 2008 Reference Number 2005 / 387.