

DEVELOPMENTAL ADJUSTMENT OF THE PRE-SCHOOL CHILD  
TO THE DIVORCE PROCESS

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CHAPTER ONE

MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY, PROBLEMATIQUE, AIMS AND ORGANIZATION

1.1 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

1.1.1 Divorce as a stressful experience

Wallerstein (in Garmezy, 1983:267) notes that, "Although designed as a social remedy for an unhappy marriage, divorce has only gradually and reluctantly been acknowledged to be severely stressful for children and adolescents as well as for many adults."

1.1.2 The rising divorce rate

However, the divorce rate throughout the world seems to be rising unabated. Huntington (1985:583) cites figures released by the National Centre for Health Statistics that there is one divorce in every two marriages in the United States. In the United Kingdom where it is estimated that one in three marriages end in divorce, the number of divorces doubled from 80 000 in 1971 to 159 000 in 1984 (Jowell and Airey, 1984:139). In South Africa from 1977 to 1983, a period of ten years, the number of divorces among Whites rose from 8 890 in 1973 to 16 661 in 1983; in the Coloured group from 1 212 (1973) to 3 074 (1983), and from 187 to 762 in the same period of time among the Asians. No figures are available for Blacks. (Statistical News Release, 1984:47-49).

#### 1.1.3 Rising number of children involved in divorce

It has been projected by Glick (1979:175) that in the United States of America by 1990, almost one third of children might be expected to experience a parent's divorce before they reached the age of 18. In South Africa, Burman and Barry (1984:1) cite the Statistical News Release, 19 August 1983, Table 1, which indicated that in 1982 over two thirds of divorcing couples had a total of 22 224 children. Five years later the number of children in divorcing families had increased by thirty three percent.

#### 1.1.4 Father absence as a concomitant of divorce

Father absence is very often a concomitant of divorce since it is estimated that only about one tenth of all children (only six percent of children under six years old in 1971) who lived with a divorced parent were in the custody of their father (Glick, 1979:177). In March 1981, the number of families headed by women reached 9.1 million, the highest level ever recorded (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1981, cited by Rosenthal et al, 1986:42).

#### 1.1.5 Father absence resulting in less contact between non-custodial fathers and children

Furthermore, Furstenburg et al, (1983:663) revealed that fathers, who represented eighty nine percent of non-custodial

parents were more likely not to have had contact at all than to have seen their children even once in the previous twelve months. Only one third of the children averaged one monthly contact or more with their fathers and just one in six had maintained an average weekly contact.

#### 1.1.6 Divorce and father absence highly prevalent in contemporary society

Wolkind and Rutter (in Rutter and Hersov, 1985:48) suggest that the current rising pattern of divorce and father absence can scarcely be regarded as highly atypical, although it may well be disadvantageous for optimal psychological development.

#### 1.1.7 Adverse generalizations without substantiation in divorce literature during 50's and 60's

In the 50's and 60's attitudes toward the effects of divorce and father absence on children were not as tentative as that of Rutter and Wolkind (above). Herzog and Sudia (in Caldwell and Riccuti, 1973:141) found it necessary to write their review on "Children in Fatherless Families" in order to counteract the prevailing climate when adverse generalizations were frequently made without substantiation about the consequences of father absence; for, as Levitin (1979) points out, most of the earlier studies were bent on demonstrating a causal relationship between behavior problems or deficits and the fact that

children were living in a "fatherless" home. Furthermore, the views that single parent families are deviant forms, that they are homogeneous, and that they invariably cause dysfunctioning in children, have led to biases and problems in the choice of samples, designs, instruments and procedures (Levitin, 1979:2).

#### 1.1.8 The vital role of mediating factors in divorce research

Thus Kinard and Reinherz (1984:91) emphasize the vital role of mediating demographic and situational factors such as sex and age of children, family size, ethnicity, socio-economic status, maternal employment, amount of conflict in family, etc.

#### 1.1.9 The importance of interaction rather than linear causality

Indeed, the fact that results from examining the effects of a child's age at the time of divorce have been inconsistent (Emery, 1982:317); Kinard and Reinherz, 1984:92) serves to emphasize the importance of interaction rather than linear causality as the point of departure in this field.

#### 1.1.10 The heuristic value of pre-school stage as a focus for research

However, age is a variable that cannot be ignored, and several studies have indicated that the pre-school stage seems to be particularly vulnerable to the stress of parental

separation (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:313; Santrock, 1972:462; Henning and Oldham, 1977:56; Hodges and Bloom, 1984:34; Longfellow, in Levinger and Moles, 1979:298).

This crucial stage is of particular heuristic value from both the theoretical and practical perspectives. An examination of the pre-school stage should be useful in that it offers scope for testing theoretical viewpoints and for deepening insight into the dynamics of this stage during which, in many ways, the child may be seen more clearly than in infancy to be laying the foundation of the many facets of his psychological development and efficacy. These theoretical insights may well hold important practical implications for the psychologist in his approach to the implementation of intervention involving both or either parents and child in counselling or therapy before, during and after the divorce.

## 1.2 PROBLEMATIQUE :

### TWO MAIN PROBLEM AREAS IN FATHER ABSENCE/DIVORCE RESEARCH

#### 1.2.1 No integration of a theoretical perspective

Firstly, many of the major studies tend to neglect or to omit the theoretical underpinning necessary for an adequate evaluation of the results. Longfellow comments, concerning the suggestion of certain age-related patterns of adjustment in these studies that the investigators have provided no explanation of the meaning or significance of their observations.

"The research suffers from a lack of theoretical perspective within which to interpret and integrate such findings."

(Longfellow, in Levinger and Moles, 1979:299).

### 1.2.2 The problem of causality

Secondly, the problem of causality is inherent in studies of divorce and father absence. Biller (in Lamb, 1982:491) claims that "most researchers have treated father absence in an overly simplistic fashion". Certainly, the effects of father absence or divorce on the development of the child cannot be extricated from the multitudinous network of factors operating both intra and inter-psychologically throughout the child's development, but must be analysed within the interacting dynamics of his or her milieu.

### 1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study will be an examination of major empirical work, and of theoretical and research issues regarding the initial and developmental adjustment to the divorce process of the child in mother custody who experienced divorce at the pre-school stage - with a view to integrating theory, research and intervention within a supporting interpretative framework which emphasizes the dynamics of interaction rather than linear causality.

#### 1.4 PEDAGOGIC ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THIS STUDY

The pedagogic implications and responsibility for this study reside in the fact that the child's emotional, social, psycho-sexual and cognitive development and efficacy may be affected positively or negatively by the quality of his or her family system. In addition, there may be differences in the experiences of pre-school girls and boys in father-absent homes which could affect their attitudes towards the mother/father role, their marital and parent-child relationships in later life, and possibly, their social and community responsibility. Indeed, an awareness of the interdependence of the child's adjustment to the divorce process with the prevailing cultural milieu is essential for effective intervention which provides both the prevention and alleviation of negative adaptation and the necessary support and guidance for positive and creative growth.

#### 1.5 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study will be divided into seven chapters, according to the following scheme:

##### 1.5.1 Motivation for the study, problematique, aims, pedagogic accountability and organization of study

##### 1.5.2 Explication of important concepts and issues

- 1.5.3 Initial adjustment of the pre-school child to divorce and father absence - empirical studies and theoretical issues
- 1.5.4 Long-term adjustment of the pre-school child to divorce and father absence - empirical studies and theoretical issues
- 1.5.5 Developmental adjustment and divorce/father absence
- 1.5.6 Towards a framework integrating theory and research on the child's adaptation to the divorce process and concomitant father absence - with a view to appropriate intervention
- 1.5.7 Conclusions of study, shortcomings and future directions

CHAPTER TWO

EXPLICATION OF IMPORTANT CONCEPTS AND  
ISSUES

2.1 DEFINITION OF POPULATION UNDER FOCUS

For the purpose of precision, pre-school girls and boys (girls and boys, ages 2 - 6) will be defined as living in mother-headed, single-parent families where there is a clear legal rift. Father absence in the case of separation or abandonment will not be included.

2.2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIVORCE AND FATHER ABSENCE

As we have noted in Chapter 1, the focus on father absence (in this study) is linked up with the adjustment of the child of divorce who is in mother custody. Hetherington (1985) points out that "For most children divorce is only one in a series of family transactions and reorganizations that follow separation and marital dissolution. Following divorce, most children usually spend a period of time in a one-parent household, usually a mother-headed household" (Hetherington, 1985: 518),

2.2.1 The normative influence of the father in the family

One can only appreciate the effects of father absence if one is clearly aware of the other side of the coin, the role played by the father in "normal", intact families on various facets of the child's development. Thus, although Stevens

and Mathews (1978:85) correctly suggest that the recent flurry of works on the paternal contribution to the child's socialization and personality development is related to factors such as "political and social assaults on sex role stereotyping, increasing divorced and widowed fathers rearing their children virtually alone" (1985:85), the impact of the father absence phenomenon has been unmistakable on the urgent need to reassess the influence of the father on the child's psychological development and efficacy.

### 2.2.2 New trends in father deprivation studies

Father deprivation studies attempt to redefine the paternal role in very much the same way as maternal deprivation studies had attempted to redefine the role of the mother. Both these research trends followed in the wake of the body of theoretical and empirical investigations sparked off by Harlow and Harlow (1962), Bowlby (1973) and Ainsworth and Bell (1970) on the implications of "separation" and "attachment" in the socio-emotional and intellectual development of the child.

Six years after his first study, "The role of the father in child development" (1976), Lamb (1982) revised the book, focusing on new and different areas which reflect current trends in the field, such as, "the ways in which the father's relationship with various members of the family supplement and interact with one another in mediating both direct and indirect influences in child development" (1982:ix).

### 2.2.3 The complexity inherent in the concept, "deprivation"

Rutter (1980) in his conclusion to the second edition of "Mother Deprivation Reassessed", noted "the continuing accumulation of evidence showing the importance of deprivation and disadvantage as influences on children's psychological development" (1980:217) which amplified and confirmed Bowlby's original arguments. However, he warns the reader that the concept, "deprivation", in fact, "involves a most heterogeneous groups of adversities which operate through several quite different psychological mechanisms" (Rutter, 1980:218). Furthermore, although "separation" involving temporary or permanent absence of the caregiver is still considered to be an important stress in the development of the child, it is no longer considered to be the crucial factor. Rutter enumerates some of the new important issues which have emerged in the last eight years since the first edition of the book:

- the reciprocal nature of parent-child interaction
- the process by which parent-child relationships develop
- the links between childhood experiences and parenting behaviour
- an understanding of the vital influence of factors outside the family system, such as ecological factors and/or school-related factors
- invulnerability and the factors which protect children and enable them to develop normally in spite of stress and disadvantage.

Indeed, Rutter in a later work (1985) suggests that the term "maternal deprivation" is "misleading, in that in most cases the experiences it includes are too heterogeneous and the effects too varied for it to have any further usefulness" (1985:5). What is more, the deleterious influences cannot necessarily be restricted to maternal responsibility, "and are not the result of deprivation in the simplistic sense of loss" (Rutter, 1985:51).

#### 2.2.4 Utilization of the term "father absence"

In view of Rutter's argument, it may be as well to use the term "father absence" (not disregarding the host of implications in this term), rather than "father deprivation".

There is no doubt, according to Rutter (1985) of the important impact of children's relationship with parents and other family members on their psychological development and adjustment. "Much has still to be learned, but already enough is known to constitute a basis for a discriminating therapeutic intervention with children suffering from separation, loss and disturbed family relationships" (1985:51).

## 2.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AND ADJUSTMENT

### 2.3.1 Conceptual models as foundations of the practice of clinical child psychology

According to Simeonsson (in Walker and Roberts, 1983:26), the activities of the psychologist in the practice of clinical child psychology are not usually carried out in isolation but are linked in models or conceptual frameworks which recognize, implicitly or explicitly, the role of development and adjustment through continuity and change. These frameworks are usually grounded in some or other world view or philosophical set of assumptions. Since this study purports to examine literature on the adjustment (in terms of psychological development and psychological efficacy) of boys and girls who experienced divorce at the pre-school stage, an explication of its inherent perspective on psychological development, should further establish its fundamental approach which emphasizes interaction rather than linear causality.

### 2.3.2 Three main models of development

Gerrity et al (in Walker and Roberts, 1983) provide a useful summary of the three main modes of development: the mechanistic, the organismic and the dialectic models.

- 2.3.2.1 The mechanistic model, "based on the metaphysics of stability" (Gerrity et al, 1983:51) views the individual as reactive and passive, a "tabula rasa" at birth and developing as a result of external stimuli, e.g. the Behavioral approach (Gerrity et al, in Walker and Roberts, 1983:51).
- 2.3.2.2 The organismic model conceptualizes the individual as "inherently active and spontaneously interacting rather than reacting from birth. It is based upon the metaphysic that sees not stability but activity as primary" (Gerrity et al 1983:50). The best example of the organismic model is Piaget's theory of cognitive development which is characterized as proceeding in an invariant sequence of steps, each one qualitatively different from the next and moving towards a final end-stage.
- 2.3.2.3 The dialectic model combines the organismic and mechanistic perspectives. In addition, as Gerrity et al (1983) point out, "Rather than simply looking at the effects of the environment on men and men on environment, the dialectic developmental psychology is concerned with the relationships among changes. The changes of concern are the simultaneous progressions among the four interdependent dimensions (psychological, biological, cultural and outerphysical)" (1983:51).
- Thus, according to the dialectic model, development occurs as a function of the relationships among these progressions.

This emphasis on dynamic functional relationship rather than static function bears a strong relationship to the cybernetic feedback regulatory perspective inherent in systems theory.

### 2.3.3 Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development - a framework/model within which the divorce process may be located

#### 2.3.3.1 The nature of Bronfenbrenner's ecology

Bronfenbrenner's framework, falling within the dialectic developmental model and retaining cybernetic properties of systems theory has been suggested by Kurdek (1981:856) as a useful means of conceptualizing children's adjustment to the divorce process. According to Bronfenbrenner (1971:21), "The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded."

The four dimensions of the dialectic development model have been identified by Bronfenbrenner as "a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next. These structures are referred to as the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems" (1971:21).

#### 2.3.3.2 The mesosystem

The mesosystem refers to "interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school and neighbourhood peer group" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:25).

According to Kurdek, "the linkages of the mesosystem have not yet been systematically examined in the children's divorce adjustment literature" (Kurdek, 1981:856).

#### 2.3.3.3 The macrosystem

The macrosystem, the broadest component of Bronfenbrenner's ecology, involves the milieu of cultural beliefs, values and attitudes impinging on the life of the child and his family, beliefs "that directly or indirectly influence how a child perceives and is affected by the parent's divorce" (Kurdek 1981:851).

#### 2.3.3.4 The exosystem

The exosystem represents the environmental stability and external social support important for child and family, according to our emphasis, in the pre, peri and post-divorce period.

#### 2.3.3.5 The microsystem

The microsystem refers to the intrafamilial relations which,

according to our focus will involve the child's experiences within the family context before, during and after divorce.

#### 2.3.3.6 The ontogenic system

Kurdek has, however, incorporated another important perspective, the ontogenic system which involves the "child's individual psychological competence for dealing with stress" (Kurdek, 1981:856).

### 2.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFICACY, COPING AND STRESS

#### 2.4.1 Psychological efficacy-related to the dialectic model and to systems theory

Psychological efficacy may be defined, simply, as the relative effectiveness with which one copes, i.e. what one does about situations which may range from daily mild irritants, or major crises in the intra-relationships within the psyche and the interrelationships between the various dimensions or systems which constitute and are constituted by the dynamic development in the life of the child.

Within the dialectic model the important relationships among the four interdependent dimensions are synchrony, i.e. progress between two or more dimensions in a "mutually facilitative fashion", and dysynchrony i.e. conflict or crisis which may result in disintegration, or be resolved in extensive adaptation and further growth. One should note some affinity

of these concepts with the cybernetic principles of morpho-stasis and morphogenesis, the former implying the maintenance of the status quo of the system without growth, the latter implying development, growth and extension of the system as a result of adaptation to, or coping with a crisis or stress (Schoeman et al, 1983:13).

#### 2.4.2 Psychological stress

According to Rutter (1983), "Stress is a vague overinclusive and diffuse term but seems to apply equally to a form of stimulus or (stressor), a force requiring change or adaptation (strain), a mental state (distress) and a form of bodily reaction or response", for instance, the fight/flight adaptation syndrome" (Rutter, in Garmezy and Rutter, 1983:2).

#### 2.4.3 The relationship of psychological stress, coping and development with two central issues in developmental psychopathology

Rutter (1983:2) points out how these concepts of stress, and of coping, together with the concept of development relate to two central issues in developmental psychopathology.

##### 2.4.3.1 Coping and individual differences

The first issue, involving the notion of "coping", concerns "individual differences in children's responses to all manner of stressful events, happenings and circumstances and incorporates the phenomena of resistance and vulnerability i.e.

how it is that some children cope with stresses such as divorce or father deprivation while others do not...?" (Rutter, 1983:2).

#### 2.4.3.2 Coping process and adaptation at and through various developmental stages

The second issue hones in on further specific questions which arise concerning the developing child, i.e. not only questions concerning differential adaptive or coping processes at various stages of development, but questions concerning the effect of early stress on later development, resilience and vulnerability.

#### 2.4.3.3 Three model approaches to stress resistance (Garmezy et al, 1984)

Garmezy et al (1984:102) have suggested three generic models for describing the impact of stress and personal attributes on quality of adaptation:

- the compensatory model, where "the impact of severe stress may be counteracted or compensated for by personal qualities of strength"
- the challenge model, where "stress is treated as a potential enhancer of competence" when the degree of stress is not unduly excessive
- the immunity-versus-vulnerability model or the protective factor model, where "there is a conditional relationship between stress and personal attributes with

respect to adaptation, i.e. personal attributes modify by either dampening or amplifying the impact of stress, and may impart some degree of immunity and of vulnerability, which is the opposite side of the coin.

#### 2.4.3.4 Integration of developmental models in studies of stress and coping in children who experienced divorce at the pre-school age

In our study of the literature on the relationship between father absence and the psychological development and psychological efficacy of boys and girls, we will not only look at the ways they cope negatively or positively at various stages of development, but at the effect of this stress on various developmental tasks in general. We will examine Kaslow's model of family coping (on the micro-level), as well as on the ontogenic level, Wallerstein's model of the child's coping stages or tasks necessary to work through the stress, the dyschrony or father absence associated with divorce.

The dialectic developmental model and the systems approach as well as Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development will enable us to consider the problems from an interactive, integrative and dynamic perspective which facilitates Rutter's view that divorce involving father absence is not a "single event but follows a rather prolonged period of discord and disharmony" (Rutter, 1983:6), whether overt or covert. Thus, our emphasis will be on the child's adjustment to the divorce process, which is a more realistic approach than the

simplistic perspective implied in linear causal terms such as "the effects of father absence/divorce on the child."

#### 2.4.3.5 Divorce as a complex process rather than a single event

Indeed, "It would appear that the circumstances associated with divorce constitute (not a primary) but an additional stressor which may aggravate or precipitate additional emotional difficulties" (Rutter, 1983:6). Several studies point to the association of children's difficulties with discord and uncertainty, rather than with a final rift or separation, as such, and, one of the most important researchers in the field, Mavis Hetherington noted the fallacy of regarding divorce as a "single traumatic event involving basically the loss for the child of one parent, usually the father" (Hetherington, 1985:43).

## CHAPTER THREE

INITIAL ADJUSTMENT OF THE PRE-SCHOOL CHILD TO  
DIVORCE AND FATHER ABSENCE - EMPIRICAL  
STUDIES AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The fact that divorce occurs in an extended period of psychological disequilibrium which a great many children and adults find exceedingly stressful, raises vital questions important for theory, research and intervention concerning the expectable duration of stress-induced responses. Some of these questions can be formulated as follows:

How long will the child manifest negative (or positive) reactions?

Is the duration of these reactions not modified or compounded by the many additional changes and stresses that occur after divorce?

Are these effects likely to be permanent or temporary?

According to Wallerstein (1985:515) answers to these questions have not yet been established. What has been established is "the critical significance of the child's age and developmental stage in governing the children's initial response in white, middle class populations" (King and Kleemeier, in Walker and Roberts, 1983:1255).

King and Kleemeier (1983:1255) also point out the dramatic

consistency in the literature concerning not only the fact that children at different stages of development exhibit different short and long-term reactions to divorce but also the fact that age or developmental stage plays a significant role in the child's initial (one year) reaction to divorce.

In this chapter we shall examine, firstly, some theoretical perspectives concerning age and stage of development and the impact of crises such as divorce involving father absence. Secondly, we shall deal with some empirical studies concerning the initial impact of the divorce event on the pre-school child. The pre-schooler's execution of age-appropriate developmental tasks and the implications of father absence in the non-mastery of these tasks will be considered as well as significant differences in the reactions of boys and girls at this stage of development.

## 3.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### 3.2.1 Structural readiness

According to Jeremy Kagan (in Garnezy, 1983) "One of the significant generalizations wrenched from laboratory work in biology and psychology during the last three decades is that the organism's biological or psychological reactions to an event depend upon its preparedness, which often means its stage of development. This principle rests on many functional relations that have survived replication" (1983:191).

It is important to note the emphasis conforming to the dialectic model of development, on the dynamic interrelationship process between what Kagan calls the "structural readiness" of the child at various stages of development and the various elements in his milieu.

Having outlined the various cognitive stages according to Piaget, Kagan points out that "... both theory and data imply that the potential for an external event to generate affect is a function of the cognitive interpretation imposed by a person ... We must always expect an interaction between the even and the psychological surface it strikes" (Kagan, 1983:212).

### 3.2.2 Theories on relationship between children's age at divorce and subsequent adaptation.

Kalter and Rembar (1981:86-7), addressing the issues of the child's developmental level as reflected by age of the child at the time of divorce, cite three theoretical perspectives concerning the timing of the marital dissolution.

#### 3.2.2.1 The cumulative effect hypothesis

This hypothesis suggests that the earlier the parental divorce occurs in the child's life, the more profound its impact will be. Certain major longitudinal empirical studies such as those by Hetherington et al (1978, in Stevens and Mathews), and Kelly and Wallerstein's study (1980) have indeed found that father absence and divorce prior to the age of five years is more disruptive for boys and girls than are later separations-

hence our focus on this age group (Kalter and Rembar, 1981: 86).

#### 3.2.2.2 The critical stage hypothesis

This view, mainly held by psychoanalytic practitioners emphasizes the importance of oedipal dynamics in youngsters whose parents are divorced at the time the child is between 3 - 5 years old, the stage not only of oedipal and magical thinking, but the time when the presence of an appropriate identification figure is crucial (Kalter and Rembar, 1981:86).

#### 3.2.2.3 The recency hypothesis

This hypothesis is adopted by those who believe that although divorce is a trauma for children, these children recover within a year or two, regardless of age at the time of divorce (Kalter and Rembar, 1981:87). Kalter's own study (1981) yielded no support of the critical stage or recovery hypotheses, but suggested some evidence of a mild cumulative deficit, possibly the reflection of conflicts over developmental issues that were ascendant at the time of the divorce process (Kalter and Rembar, 1981:99).

#### 3.2.3 Maccoby's hypotheses concerning social-emotional development and vulnerability to stress

The above hypotheses advanced by Kalter and Rembar (as above) may be comfortably integrated with hypotheses advanced by

Maccoby in her summary on developmental vulnerability to stress (in Garmezy and Rutter, 1983:217-347).

Maccoby suggests that

3.2.3.1 Hypothesis 1

"It is unlikely that there is any linear increase or decrease with age in vulnerability to stress" (1983:220).

3:2.3.2 Hypothesis 2

"The younger the child, the greater is the importance of environmental structure in reducing the child's vulnerability to behavioural disruption under potentially stressful conditions"(1983:220).

3.2.3.3 Hypothesis 3

Furthermore, citing the role of neurological maturation on the child's increasing ability to inhibit anger and frustration, Maccoby postulates that

"When an arousing event leads to strong negative affect, the younger the child, the greater the likelihood of extensive behavioral disorganization" (1983:221).

3.2.3.4 Hypothesis 4

Hypotheses 2 and 3 are relevant to the cumulative hypothesis, while hypothesis 4, which states that,

"With increasing age, there is an increasing repertoire of situationally relevant coping behaviors, permitting a lessening of exclusive reliance on the availability of the primary attachment figure under stressful conditions" (1983:223), implies the qualities of regeneration inherent in the recency hypothesis.

### 3.2.3.5 Hypothesis 5

The role of the child's changing relationship with authority figures as a result of his changing patterns of vulnerability and evolving methods of coping with stress is implicit in Maccoby's contention that "in the pre-adolescent years there is a gradual shift from reliance on external guidance to reliance on self-regulation" (1983:225).

### 3.2.3.6 Hypothesis 6

Maccoby suggests that peer relationships increasingly are associated with concrete activities (1983:225).

### 3.2.3.7 Hypothesis 7

Further, she emphasizes the development both of the ego or "self" as the child approaches adolescence.

### 3.2.3.8 Hypothesis 8

"Increasing sensitivity and understanding of the reactions of others to self" (1983:225) become increasingly evident.

### 3.2.3.9 Hypothesis 9

He is beginning to develop the ability to monitor or reflect on his own thought processes (1983:227).

### 3.2.3.10 Hypothesis 10

He starts to embark on more "planful" problem solving (1983:224).

## 3.2.4 Relationship of Maccoby's hypotheses with other developmental theories

The interdependence of cognition, moral and emotional development may be seen if a comparison is drawn between hypotheses 3.2.3.8 - 3.2.3.10 and Piaget's cognitive stages, as well as Kohlberg's stages of moral development. For instance, the highest stage of emotional evaluation where the adolescent

develops a more meta-cognitive approach, able to monitor or reflect on his own thought processes (1983:227) and embark on more "planful" problem solving (1983:226) relates to Piaget's stage of formal operations and to Kohlberg's highest stage of moral development, "the post-conventional, autonomous or principled level".

#### 3.2.4.1 Empirical substantiation of developmental theory

It would seem that Wallerstein and Kelly's (1980) clinical study substantiates developmental theory. Wallerstein and Kelly suggest the generalization from their findings that although each child is an individual responding to and interacting with individual circumstances, "each ascends at his own pace and in his own way within broad limits, but the progression is common to all ... Consistent with developmental theory the major differences which we observed in the initial responses of the children were related to the child's psychological age and place along the (developmental) continuum" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:51).

According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), the developmental perspective permits a view of developmental or age-related response patterns. It also enables us to conceptualize the effect or potential effect of the divorce on the child in terms of the effect of divorce or father absence on the particulars of the child's developmental agenda at the time of the crisis, namely the tasks which the child is engaged

in mastering at that time ..." (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:51).

### 3.2.5 The concept of developmental tasks

Indeed, the most effective means of assessing the child's normative development is in terms of his mastery of age-appropriate developmental hurdles. Thomas and Chess (1981) suggest that the goals of human behaviour starting at birth, are "social competence and task mastery", both of which evolve as a result of the reciprocal interactions of environmental demands and the organism's inherent capabilities and "unique capacity for learning" (cited by Thomas, 1981:602).

Again we should note the importance of the interaction dynamic which was also a vital component of the "structural readiness" emphasized by Kagan (p.23 above) and which is inherent in the dialectic model of development.

### 3.2.6 The concept of plasticity in developmental theory

The organism's "unique capacity for learning", and adaptation derived from the flexibility and plasticity attribute "of the human brain" constitutes the basis for another important concept, which has implications which are as significant for developmental theory and practice as the concept of developmental tasks.

According to Thomas (1981), the concept of plasticity, which may be reconciled, not only with the adaptive and evolutionary aspects of Maccoby's hypotheses but also with the recency hypothesis, has resulted in new and important perspectives in developmental theory. Furthermore, the implications of this concept are considerable and most relevant to prognosis and therapeutic practice especially in terms of long-term effects of crises such as divorce.

"We now have to give up the illusion that once we know the child's psychological history, subsequent personality and functioning is ipso facto predictable. On the other hand, we now have a much more optimistic vision of human development. The emotionally traumatized child is not doomed.."  
(Chess, cited by Thomas, 1981:595).

### 3.3 THE DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF THE PRE-SCHOOL CHILD

#### 3.3.1 Description of developmental tasks as a base-line of "normal" development.

Having discussed the theoretical perspectives concerning implications of age and stage of development on the manifestation and extent of trauma such as divorce, we move onto the question of developmental tasks; for, before we trace the effects of divorce on a pre-school child which may implicate deviations from the norm, it is useful to bear in mind, and to describe, as a base-line, the normative characteristics and developmental tasks of that stage of the child's development.

### 3.3.2 The implications of the concept of plasticity for studies of child adaptation

Even though the pre-school years (2-5 years old) are believed, traditionally, to be crucial in the child's development, since it "is at this stage that the foundations for complex behaviour are laid" (Schroeder et al, in Walker and Roberts, 1983:296), the concept of plasticity is, however, of paramount importance since several recent follow-up studies (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1984; Hetherington, 1985) have shown that the pre-school child's developmental status need not necessarily predict his behaviour at a later stage (Schroeder et al, 1983:296). Nevertheless, the potential for effective intervention based on a thorough understanding of the child would seem to be particularly relevant at this stage, when there is no doubt that the child is at risk and vulnerable to the immediate impact of family disruption and crisis.

### 3.3.3 General characteristics of the pre-school child

It is merely for the sake of convenience that one attempts to unravel the strands of physical, cognitive and social development. These are interdependent as the child emerges from the sensory mode of action and interaction to the conceptual symbolic prelogical mode of language, thought and emotion. The child seems to be learning to delay gratification of his physical urges, to learn to wait for meals 'within reason', to emancipate himself from his nappies (the anal stage, according to Freud) and to control his tantrums.

Although still predominantly egocentric in that he is unable to take the perspective of another person, he is beginning to learn to form basic social relationships, and both to identify with, and to separate from his mother and father.

According to Erikson's model, depending on the security and support of his home background, the pre-school child has already developed a perspective of trust or mistrust in his first year, shame or doubt, in his second year, initiative or guilt in his third.

#### 3.3.4 Developmental milestones of the pre-school child

Schroeder et al (in Walker and Roberts, 1983:296-301) and Rutter (1975:73-85) provide a succinct outline of the developmental milestones of the pre-schooler, from which the following main points have been abstracted. We must be particularly aware of the prevalence of individual differences at this stage. "Individual differences are nowhere more apparent than during the pre-school years" (Schroeder, 1983:297).

##### 3.3.4.1 Physical and motor development

Height and weight increase steadily at this period. By the age of five years the child's weight has usually doubled that of a year, while his height at the age of four years is usually double the birth length. By the time the child reaches the age of five, his brain has already developed to 90% of

its adult size. By the age of five, the average child has mastered the gross motor skills of climbing, balancing, jumping, running, pushing and pulling.

At the age of two the child is developing fine motor skills beginning with scribbling to the ability to print his name and reproduce geometric shapes by the time he is about to go to school.

Schroeder et al (1983:297) point out that toilet training not only involves voluntary control of the sphincter muscles but also the ability to communicate needs verbally or by other means. According to Rutter (1975:57), enuresis is an example of a behaviour which is affected when a stressful experience interferes with normal maturational processes.

#### 3.3.4.2 Cognitive development

As has already been described briefly in 3.3.3, Piaget (1980:20) suggests that the pre-schooler is "prelogical ... his real domain is still that of action and manipulation." It is notable that by the end of this period I. Q. scores tend to become more consistent and stable. However, the child has yet to develop the skill of associating letter-names and phonemes with grapheme equivalents, an ability necessary for reading.

### 3.3.4.3 Language development

This stage, named the conceptual-symbolic stage by Piaget, marks an enormous spurt in language development. The child's vocabulary increases from 100-200 words while his syntax and sentence structure reach complex "adult-like" levels. An important component of the pre-schooler's language development is the asking of questions, from questions prefixed by "what?", "where?", and "who?" to questions prefixed by "why?".

### 3.3.4.4 Social and personality development

The issues of separation and identification have been touched on previously. Schroeder (1981:298) cites as an alternative to the psycho-dynamic view of separation and identification, a social network model within which social development involves a number of independent relationships. According to Schroeder, research seems to show that in the child's social network parents are associated with "dependency and security" whereas peers are associated with play and teaching.

#### 3.3.4.4.1 The role of play

Rutter (1975:74-80) suggests that play serves an important developmental function in the pre-school child. He summarizes a statement by Susanna Miller that "In pretend play the child may be exploring his environment, lessening his fears, increasing his excitement, trying to understand a

puzzling event by graphic representations, seeking confirmation of a hazy memory or altering an event to make it pleasant to himself in fantasy." Play also plays an important role in assessment and treatment since from play one can deduce much information about the child's intellectual level, language development, feelings, thoughts, and social relationships, anxieties or current concerns."

#### 3.3.4.4.2 Identification

The identification process involves both the child's sex role identification and the beginning of his moral development. Schroeder et al (1983:299) regard "the parents' method of enforcing the family moral code plus the child's interaction with family members as probably the most important factors in this process for pre-schoolers." It is also notable that Bandura (cited by Schroeder, 1983:299) found that the child will imitate "those who appear powerful and competent and those who share a warm, loving relationship with them."

#### 3.3.4.5 Psychosexual development

Rutter (1971:271-2) states that three distinct aspects are involved in the process of psychosexual development.

3.3.4.5.1 Gender role involves the child's identification of himself as male or female.

3.3.4.5.2 Sex role preference involves the sex the child would like to be

3.3.4.5.3 Sex role standard. involves the acquisition of behavior and attitudes which are culturally appropriate for the child's sex.

It seems that by the age of three the child's sex role identity as well as sexual preference is becoming well established.

The fact that sexual preference is established earlier in boys than in girls may be perhaps of significance in studies of father absence. According to Rutter (1971:276), "Freud was probably right that the period of increasing genital interests about the age of 4 - 5 years is sometimes associated with castration anxiety and hostility to the same sexed parent."

Whether one take a Freudian or Learning Theory approach to psychosexual development, Rutter emphasizes that, although the evidence is as yet circumstantial, it seems clear that, in spite of the fact "that biological factors play some part, the way a child is brought up is the prime determinant of his gender role, of his sex type and of the direction of his sexual interests" (Rutter, 1971:276).

3.3.4.6 Emotional behavior

A child of two to three years old is at the age of temper tantrums. These tantrums gradually diminish, while, however, the intensity of his fears increases and the nature of his fear changes, with his fears of animals at age 2 - 3 changing to fears of darkness, nightmares and imaginary

creatures at age 4 - 5. During this pre-school period the expression of emotional responses such as anger, love and joy is intense, labile and uninhibited, the latter, because the child "is in the process of learning how to express emotions in a socially acceptable way". Schroeder emphasizes that the nature of the child's emotional responses, like other behaviors is the result of the interaction between genetic-constitutional factors, environmental influences, past learning and the developmental level of the child (Schroeder, 1983:300).

#### 3.3.4.7 The concept of "goodness of fit" in the child's mastery of developmental tasks

Thomas, Chess and Birch, in their study of the temperament of children, emphasize the concept of "goodness of fit", which results "when the properties of the environment and its expectations are in accord with the organism's own capacities, motivations and style of behaving" (Thomas, 1981:603).

Such an optimal situation (again we note the emphasis of interaction between child and environment) facilitates the optimal mastery of the aforementioned developmental tasks of the child.

"Goodness of fit", however, does not imply an absence of stress and conflict "which are the inevitable concomitants of the developmental process... The issue involved in disturbed behavioral functioning is rather one of excessive

stress resulting from poorness of fit between environmental expectation and the demands and capacities of the child at a particular level of development" (Thomas, 1981:603) . Thus, in circumstances of excessive stress it could be expected that the child's development would be thwarted in some way whether on the cognitive level and that difficulty in the mastery of developmental tasks might be manifested to some extent.

#### 3.4 THE IMMEDIATE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN IRRESPECTIVE OF AGE

Wallerstein and Kelly (1975) found that "for children and adolescents, (in their study) the separation and its aftermath was the most stressful period of their lives. The family rupture evoked an acute sense of shock, intense fears and grieving which the children found overwhelming. Over one half of the entire group were distraught, with a sense that their lives had been completely disrupted. Less than 10 percent of the children were relieved by their parents' decision to divorce, despite the high incidence of exposure to physical violence during the marriage" (1975:35).

According to the above clinical study, the anguish of the child and adolescent was neither affected by a rational understanding of the issues which had lead to the divorce, nor by the fact that divorce was, in fact, highly prevalent in the community.

3.4.1 General factors contributing to the child's distress during the divorce period

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980:34-54) list several general factors that play a significant role in the child's distress during the divorce period:

3.4.1.1 Influence of diminished capacity of parenting

The diminished capacity to fulfil the parental role, associated in certain individuals with depression, overwhelming new duties, and in others, with a compulsion to get onto the social merry-go-round and a denial of feeling of loss and rejection in both herself and the child.

3.4.1.2 The simple procedure of informing the child about the divorce

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980:39) report that four-fifths of the youngest children were neither provided with an adequate explanation of the divorce, nor with an assurance of continual care. The hesitancy of parents in explaining their divorce reflected a high level of anxiety and discomfort about discussing the family breakup with their young children.

3.4.1.3 Immediate responses of children

Immediate responses of children were: panic, fear, apprehension, delayed reactions, numbness. Many of the younger children (one third) reacted with disbelief (Wallerstein

and Kelly, 1980:39).

3.4.1.4 Lack of extra-marital support

Lack of extra marital support often made the parent and the child roles almost untenable.

3.4.2 Common themes

There are certain common themes that occur with "varying intensities and configurations at various stages of development", according to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980:45).

3.4.2.1 A heightened sense of vulnerability concerning security both physical and economic

3.4.2.2 A threat of abandonment

3.4.2.3 Prevalent sadness and yearning. "We need a daddy. We don't have a daddy!" (as a typical 5 year old response), (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:49).

3.4.2.4 Feelings of depression.

3.4.2.5 Feelings of rejection - often young children identified themselves with their mother

3.4.2.6 Feelings of loneliness

3.4.2.7 Conflict of loyalties

3.4.2.8 Anger and aggression - temper tantrums in the younger children

3.4.3 Individual differences in children's initial reaction to divorce

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) note that children's initial

response to the divorce of their parents was affected by factors such as the nature and degree of stress, for instance parental rejection, which the child had suffered previously. Children with poor psychological functioning such as low self-esteem, were also more adversely affected.

Another group, those children from apparently close-knit families were shocked, stunned to such an extent that their coping capacities were almost immobilized. However, although the role of individual differences cannot be underestimated, and although Wallerstein and Kelly expected some "general correspondence between the child's initial behavioral response to the divorce and his or her age or developmental stage", they state, "We were unprepared for the relative neatness of the broad bands of behavior that we were able to identify" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:52).

Thus, Wallerstein and Kelly were able to divide their subjects into four age-related groups. Pre-school group were aged from 3 - 5½ years, young school-age children were aged between six to eight years old, older school-age children were from nine to eleven years old, while adolescents constituted the fourth group. The division took place on the basis of age-related responses that seemed to fall reliably into these categories.

Furthermore, the findings of the Wallerstein and Kelly Project

tend to correlate strongly with other studies which have been made in the field.

### 3.5 IMMEDIATE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE AND FATHER ABSENCE ON THE PRE-SCHOOL CHILD

#### 3.5.1 Findings of some important studies

##### 3.5.1.1 McDermott (1968)

One of the first studies in this area was that of McDermott (1968), who observed children 3 - 5 years old at time of parental separation.

McDermott (1968:1426) divided his subjects into four groups according to the clusters of behavior which emerged:

- 3.5.1.1.1 "the unchanged group", who, not unaffected by the divorce seemed to have more highly developed adaptive techniques, particularly play and fantasy
- 3.5.1.1.2 "the sad, angry children", who, manifested depression, aggression, as well as regression from house and human fantasy play, the age-appropriate fantasy play (discussed on p.35) to animal fantasy play.
- 3.5.1.1.3 the "detached group" who manifested most severe regression and disintegration
- 3.5.1.1.4 "the pseudo-adult group" which consisted of three girls who seemed to utilize quarrelsome attitudes, bossiness and pseudomature mechanisms in order to handle conflict.

### 3.5.1.2 Wallerstein and Kelly (1975)

The study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1975) which has been referred to previously (p.38 ) constitutes one of the major works in the field of the effects of divorce on children. This longitudinal clinical study of 131 children from 60 families consisted of initial assessments at one month and thirteen months after the divorce, with further follow-up assessments five and ten years later. Thirty four of the children under the age of 5 were considered separately and constituted the pre-school sample.

In this sample three groups emerged with "discernable patterns of behavior" broadly related to chronological age as well as to developmental and cognitive maturity.

#### 3.5.1.2.1 The youngest group

The youngest group, aged two and a half to three years old consisting of 4 boys and 5 girls, without exception reacted to the family disruption with "observable and significant behavior changes, which included acute regressions in toilet training despite a history of stabilized control, increased irritability, whining and crying, general fearfulness, acute separation anxieties, various sleep problems, cognitive confusion, increased autoerotic activities, return to transitional objects, escalation in aggressive behavior and tantrums" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:602).

It was observed that "the regression occurred most precipitously in those children who had been given no explanation of their father's absence" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:602).

Wallerstein and Kelly suggest further, that the reactions of these children who, with the exception of one child, were all in the care of their mother, are very similar to those reactions described by Bowlby and Anna Freud in their accounts of separation anxiety reactions from primary caregivers (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:602).

It appeared, according to the researchers, that the coping resources of this group were limited. They seemed to project their feelings of being burdened by constructing "unsafe toy worlds filled with ferocious animals and were joyless" and confused in their play patterns which became constricted and aimless, continually searching.

It is notable that Hetherington et al (1978) in their longitudinal study on play and social interaction in children following divorce, observed "limitations and rigidity" in play patterns at two months after divorce (Hetherington et al, 1978:26).

#### 3.5.1.2.2 The middle group

In Wallerstein and Kelly's middle group (aged three and three quarters to four and three quarters), divorce appeared "to

cogwheel with early superego development affecting the children's self-esteem and self-image." Some children blamed themselves for "driving their father away"(1980:66).

Aggressive behavior and fear of aggression increased, as well as a preoccupation with the replaceability of the departed parent i.e. "We don't have a daddy anymore", "I'll need a new daddy!" including also a concern with their own replaceability, "Will my daddy find another little boy?" (1975:605).

In contrast to the youngest group, regression was not the favoured initial response and appeared in less than half of these children. Instead, they appeared to begin to resort to fantasy which very often seemed to be a means of denial, e.g. both parents in bed together, or, more oedipal in nature - "my daddy sleeps in my bed every night" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:805).

#### 3.5.1.2.3 The oldest group

In the oldest pre-school group were 14 children, 9 boys and 5 girls. Although all of these children manifested the same restlessness, increased whininess, moodiness, general irritability, separation problems and temper tantrums as their younger peers, the children in this group seemed, unlike the younger groups, to grasp the rational implications of the divorce.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1975) emphasize two important attributes of this group, firstly, that in these older children, "for the first time we encounter ... children who were in no way impeded in their developmental progress, their liveliness, or their self-confidence by the divorce events and secondly, "that among them there was a greater consistency between the clinical picture at the outset and the time of follow-up" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:608-9).

Thus, the more resilient children appeared to weather the divorce by finding gratification outside the home, by dissociating themselves from home environment and home relationships.

However, the more vulnerable children in the group seemed to find difficulty in "bringing resolution to oedipal conflicts" and manifested delay in "beginning the tasks of latency" (1975:625).

The reactions of the girls manifested an exaggeration and "overuse" of denial through prolonged oedipal fantasy and delay in coming to grips with latency.

### 3.5.2 Theoretical implications of studies cited

#### 3.5.2.1 "Structural readiness" and/or a socio-cognitive developmental perspective within the dialectic developmental framework

Longfellow (in Levinger and Moles, 1979:299-300) suggests that a socio-cognitive developmental perspective is important in a consideration of children's reactions to divorce, not only in order to evaluate these responses in the light of what the child actually understands about the situation, but also as regards clinical intervention. If therapy is to be useful or effective, it must be pitched at the level of the child's understanding to implement what Kagan has called "structural readiness".

Thus, on the whole, the confusion of the pre-schooler at his parents' divorce involves not only the feelings of loss and separation which he is unable to express, but also an inability characteristic of this age, to grasp the concept of "family" and "relationships".

As Longfellow (in Levinger and Moles, 1979) points out, pre-schoolers usually think in an egocentric way. They are, largely, unable to think in abstractions and, "in trying to understand why their parents have split up, they look mainly to external observable actions; they often juxtapose two independent, unrelated events in a causal manner. Because their reasoning is egocentric, these children's explanations are apt to centre on themselves", so that they actually believe that the divorce involves them directly, or they have been responsible for the divorce, because, for instance, "I was a bad boy - I didn't put my toys away that day" (Longfellow, 1979:200).

### 3.5.2.2 The task of separation as affected by divorce within the dialectical developmental framework

It seems clear that one of the developmental tasks most affected by divorce is the task of separation. This task has not been mastered, for example, by the child who clings to the parent (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:57) or by the child whose hunger for affection is manifested by his climbing onto the laps of strangers (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:61).

Indeed, the inextricable interdependence between the cognitive, emotional, social and environmental strands in the child's development is evident in this separation phenomenon; for, during the process of the smooth loosening of ties between the dependent and the caregiver, the child is cognitively and emotionally deepening his sense of "self", of identity, but simultaneously feeling free to model himself on his father and complement himself against his mother (and vice versa for the girl). In an atmosphere of nurturance, he develops the courage and the initiative to explore and to play spontaneously, simultaneously developing the physical, emotional, cognitive and social perspectives of his "being-in-the-world".

In an atmosphere of insecurity, he becomes crippled by fear, by confusion, by guilt, unable, unwilling to explore and to play, or to develop the physical, emotional, cognitive and social facets of his personality, unable to forge his identity, or to attempt to model himself easily on parent models who evoke sadness, aggression, fear or ambivalence rather than

confidence and trust. (According to Erikson's developmental model, this stage is conceptualized as negotiating the struggle between initiative and guilt.)

### 3.5.2.3 Confirmation of Maccoby's hypotheses and of the cumulative effect hypothesis

The tentative conclusion that the pre-school child is particularly vulnerable to the effects of divorce because of his limited cognitive development and inadequate coping devices would confirm Maccoby's hypotheses, and the cumulative hypothesis (see pp 24, 26 above).

However, it is important to note that although the effects of divorce are particularly pervasive at this developmental stage when the child is engaged in the fulfilment of every many crucial and fundamental developmental tasks, these are initial reactions. It is only through longitudinal studies that we are able to gauge and evaluate long-term effects and test the extent of the validity of the plasticity concept.

### 3.5.3 The initial direct effects of father absence on child adjustment

The initial effects of father absence are documented in some important studies. Wallerstein and Kelly's study documents several direct responses of children to the departure of their father which have already been cited. The elaboration of

maccabre fantasies "to explain the father's departure" (1980: 58), and the "bewilderment as to the nature of human relationships and personal ties" were other common responses in this study. McDermott mentions frequent absences from nursery school, frequent colds and stomach aches in his sample of pre-schoolers whose fathers had recently left home (McDermott, 1968:1430). If one bears in mind the multiplicity of variables operating in the home (and milieu, whether school, work or community), of the newly divorced family, it is doubtful whether any direct causal inferences can be made.

#### 3.5.3.1 Initial indirect effects of father absence on child adjustment

However, there is no doubt that indirect effects of father absence pervade the child's physical and psychic milieu. Often, in attempting to cope financially, mother has to go out to work. Several studies have noted the debilitating economic effects of divorce on the mother-headed home (Espenshade, 1979; Henning and Oldham, 1977). Frequently the middle class mother in these studies, unused to her deteriorated financial situation, attempted to bolster her battered psyche, her feelings of sexual and personal inadequacy by embarking on a hectic social round.

The decreased physical and mental availability of the custodial parent (usually the mother) in contrast to the situation where there had been a special protective bond between mother and young child during an unhappy marriage, often resulted in young children clamouring for more attention. Generally this

situation arose after a hard day "when mother had least energy available and was faced with numerous household chores too numerous or too difficult for young children to help with" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:25).

According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), "One of the ironies of the woman's move towards independence, increased self-esteem and personal growth was that the children did not always share in the benefits, at least not in the first year. Certainly one of the most pressing dilemmas for the single parent is the difficulty in balancing financial and psychological needs of parent and child in the wake of separation" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:25).

Thus, it is important to consider father absence in terms of the dialectic developmental framework and the systems approach. Child system, inter and intra-psychic, parent system, economic and community systems are inextricably interacting in the post divorce situation.

#### 3.5.3.2 Study by Hetherington et al (1978) of parent-child interactions shortly after divorce

(NOTE: This study appears in Stevens and Mathews (1978) which must automatically be regarded as the bibliographical source in every Hetherington et al (1978) reference in this assignment.)

Hetherington et al (1978) made a contribution to the field of "divorce and father absence effects" as significant as that of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980). In contrast to the clinical study of the latter, the former made a longitudinal multimethod,

multi-perspectival study of divorced families in which the mean age of the children was 3.92 years of age. In order to investigate family interactions, they used interviews with parents, diary records of the parents, behaviour checklists of child behaviour, parents' rating of child behaviour, a battery of personality tests as well as laboratory and home observations of parent-child interchanges. They reported, concerning the parent-child interaction (1978:163) two months after divorce that "Divorced parents made few maturity demands, communicated less well, tended to be less affectionate and showed marked inconsistency in discipline and control of their children in comparison to married parents." These reactions are not surprising in view of the difficulties parents experience at this stage, according to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980:25).

### 3.5.3.3 Comparison of parental interactions with boys and girls respectively

The micro-analyses of Hetherington et al (1978), focusing on the behavioural interactions from a social learning perspective, facilitate our understanding of how stereotyped patterns of reciprocal responses, indirectly the result of stressful circumstances, can eventually contribute substantially to the deterioration and breakdown of what had previously been a nurturant relationship between mother and child.

A notable observation arising from this study is that poor parenting was most apparent when divorced parents, particularly

mothers, interacted with their sons. Divorced parents, according to Hetherington et al, communicated less, were less consistent and used more negative sanctions with sons than with daughters, while divorced mothers (in the laboratory situation) exhibited fewer positive behaviours (such as positive sanctions and affiliations) and more negative behaviours (such as negative commands, negative sanctions, and opposition to children's requests) with sons than with daughters. Whereas girls were appropriately reinforced by their mothers for compliance, boys were not as fortunate (Hetherington et al, 1978:163).

Indeed, there is a strong correlation between poor parenting practices coupled with coercive behaviour and undesirable, coercive behaviour in children, especially in sons.

Little children, especially boys of divorced parents, according to Hetherington et al (1978), exhibited more negative behaviour than the children of intact families. Boys were "more oppositional and aggressive and girls were more whining, complaining and compliant ... The divorced mother was harassed by her sons" (Hetherington et al, 1978:169). The contrast immediately after divorce between the disciplined and more indulgent interaction with children of mothers and fathers, respectively, (Hetherington et al, 1978:164; Tooty, 1975:40) typified by the child's comment, "Dad lets me when I'm with him!" (Tooty, 1975:40), has been noted in several clients consulting the Stellenbosch Clinic for Child and Parent Guidance. Mrs S (1) and Mrs S (2) both resorted to an almost inflexible, disciplined routine, only to find this routine undermined during his weekend

away with a laissez-faire father.

The differential effects on already confused and ambivalent little boys and girls, not only on their identification process but also on self-image and socialization developmental tasks cannot be ignored, aggravating the already considerable stress on the maternal role, and leading to an intensified chain of reciprocal interactions between mother and children, especially sons.

Tooley (1975) describes 'the boy' between 4-7 years old, reared in a fatherless divorced household seen in outpatient evaluation of an outpatient clinic as "physically aggressive, defiant, bossy and bullying, unmanageable and hyperactive, whose behaviour is designed to reassure himself, to intimidate others and to keep the weak, vulnerable, helpless, frightened self well hidden from every eye, i.e. his behaviour is essentially an ego-coping device" (Tooley, 1975:32). She suggests that these reactions of the little boy may represent an identification with the lost object as if the small son might perhaps be playing a father's role as he had perceived his father playing. (Tooley, 1975:39).

Wallerstein and Kelly (1975:611), although they observed no significant differences in patterns of behaviour between boys and girls, noted that, although little boys employed fantasy to "undo the painful reality of the family rupture", they appeared less able than the girls to deny the father's departure. The girls, however, were "nourished for years

by fantasies about their father and his expected return" (1980:61). According to the authors, "these fantasies clearly served to reverse the unbearable sense of rejection, of not having been loved sufficiently, if at all" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:61).

On the surface, it appears that McDermott's (1968:1428) findings implied, similarly, that pre-school girls seemed to be less affected than boys by divorce and father absence. He states that, generally, girls seemed to be less dramatic and acute than boys, but more "sulky and petulant", and warns that these behaviours "which are rarely regarded as problematic, yet, may be even more serious" (McDermott, 1968:1428), an observation which seems to have been corroborated by Hetherington's (1972) study of "acting out" adolescent girls who had lived in the custody of their mother since pre-school years.

McDermott's suggestion that the behaviour of the girls in the pseudomature group could be seen to be "a kind of defensive identification with a real or fantasied negative part of the mother that has been abandoned by the father" (McDermott, 1968:1429) is an interesting hypothesis which serves to increase the realization that no simple conclusions may be drawn from these studies.

### 3.6 REVIEW OF CHAPTER THREE

An attempt has been made in this chapter firstly, to delineate some theoretical issues inherent in the question of age or stage of development and the impact of a crisis such as divorce. Secondly, the concept of "development task" was discussed, which was followed by a description of the typical pre-school child and the developmental tasks characteristic at this stage.

The initial general responses of children to divorce were then outlined as well as the effect of individual differences on children's reactions.

We have dealt with empirical studies on the initial effects of the divorce on pre-schoolers as well as the implication of the effects of father absence in these studies with special reference to indirect effects as evinced in studies of parent-child interactions.

Finally, some observations comparing the responses of boys and girls at the pre-school stage have been presented.

### 3.7 CONCLUSIONS

Various conclusions may be made from the above account.

### 3.7.1 The role of interaction and the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework

The empirical work serves to emphasize the fact that human phenomena cannot be seen in linear causal terms but only in terms of interactions, and that these interactions take place at all levels, ramifying from the intrapsychic, to the interpersonal to the relationship between family system to school and community systems.

Even the behavioural interactions in the Hetherington et al (1978) studies may be extrapolated to psychological, social and economic stress as well as to social attitudes concerning the vulnerability of little boys versus little girls. Thus, the interactive dynamic and the interrelationship of the varied elements of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework is already evident in the initial impact of divorce and the reactions of the child.

### 3.7.2 The difficulty of differentiating between initial and long-term adjustments

Furthermore, it is just as difficult to separate reactions and interactions in time as it is to unravel them in space. Thus, although we have attempted to "cordon off" initial reactions from long-term effects, no clear distinction can nor should be made between the two. As Wallerstein and Kelly noted, "to distinguish between distress and psychological harm is well-nigh impossible" (1980:54).

## CHAPTER FOUR

THE LONG-TERM ADJUSTMENT OF THE PRE-SCHOOL CHILD  
TO THE DIVORCE PROCESS - EMPIRICAL STUDIES  
AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

4.1 THE RAISON D'ETRE FOR LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

Sroufe and Rutter (1984) suggest that one of the central tasks in developmental psychopathology is the "task of predictability, now more broadly defined as understanding the changing manifestations of patterns of adaptation across time .... Competence and incompetence, vulnerability and stress are two sides of the same coin" (Sroufe and Rutter, 1984:18).

These patterns, which encompass both successful adaptation and maladaptation enable us to develop some insight into the factors that "pull subjects towards or away from increased risk at various age periods" (Sroufe and Rutter, 1984:18).

If development is conceptualised not "as a series of linear additions" but rather in terms of "reorganisation of both new and old elements" (Sroufe and Rutter, 1985:20) then it will be recognised that "disorganised behaviour generally does not simply spring forth without connection to previous quality of adaptation, or without changing environmental supports or altered environmental challenges. Even where qualitative change in functioning occurs, as when a well-functioning individual later shows a severely disordered behaviour

(due to environmental and/or physiological factors) it is presumed that the particular form of maladaptation will be related to the adaptational history. Change, as well as continuity, is lawful and therefore reflective of coherent development" (Sroufe and Rutter, 1985:21-22).

Consequently, tracing the development of pathology, or, indeed, of the process of adaptation to change is inherently complex, and, according to Sroufe and Rutter (1985) will require longitudinal research that has been grounded in developmental theory and developmental knowledge rather than random empirical procedures based on the whim of the researcher and on the availability of subjects. Indeed, the use of terms such as "effects", "impact", and even the separation of "initial effects" from "long term effects" is a contradiction of the reciprocal interactions in time and space which are inherent to the dialectical model of development.

#### 4.2 ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTER FOUR

However, for the sake of convenience, we shall retain the terms "initial" and "long term", as applied to the pre-school child's adjustment process to divorce and the consequences of divorce. In this chapter we shall examine some empirical observations of pre-school children's reactions to father absence/divorce manifested after one year, two years, five years, six years and ten years, and attempt to relate these findings to some of the theoretical issues raised previously. We shall then briefly peruse some of the work on the relationship between father

absence/divorce and aspects of the child's development such as psychosexual development, cognitive and social development, again bearing in mind that theoretical underpinnings are necessary to understand and interpret these studies and their results.

#### 4.3 EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF LONG TERM ADJUSTMENT, AND THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

##### 4.3.1 One year after divorce - empirical findings

Hetherington et al (1978:164) noted that the one year period after the divorce appeared to mark a peak of stress in parent-child relations especially in custodial mother-child relations. Both home and laboratory observations revealed parents' lack of control manifested as a relative inability to gain compliance from their children in comparison to parents in intact homes. In Wallerstein and Kelly's study of pre-school children it was found that at the follow-up, a year after their initial assessment, more than 44% (N=15) of the total sample were in a "significantly deteriorated psychological condition" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:615). This finding, according to the research team, "has sobering implications" in view of the fact that none of these children had "any prior history of psychological difficulty" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:615). All of them, had, according to the team, satisfactorily mastered age-appropriate developmental tasks at the initial assessment. Furthermore, the fact that Wallerstein had employed conservative diagnostic criteria in view of the "temporary regressions and frequent discontinuities of early childhood development", emphasises the degree of disinte-

gration in this group. This disintegration seemed to be strongly associated with a diminution in the quality of the mother-child relationship (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:616).

#### 4.3.2 One year after divorce - theoretical issues.

The sudden deluge of various influences which converge on him at different levels during this stage such as loss of time spent with father (a questionable operational definition which overlooks the qualitative element) (Jacobson, 1978:357) interparental hostility (Jacobson, 1978:17) the sudden economic deprivation of the female rather than the male household (Epinshade, 1979:623; Day and Bahr, 1986:86) all combine to compound the misery of the pre-school child in the mother-custodial home.

The social-cognitive developmental perspective provides another useful level of explanation as Hetherington et al (1978) suggest when they hypothesize that the improvement in the parent-child relationship which had taken place in their study between the first and second years after divorce lay in the child's improved capacity for understanding and longer attention span associated with the cognitive maturation process (Hetherington et al, 1978:166).

"It may also be that internalization and role-taking were increasing and explanations involving appeals to the rights and feelings of others became more effective" (Hetherington et al, 1978:15:166). Discussing the importance of age as an important mediator of the effects of divorce on children within the Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) study, Longfellow claims that "pre-schoolers place a

greater psychological strain on their divorced parents and at the same time seem cognitively less able to cope with the divorce" (Longfellow, in Levinger and Moles, 1979:305).

However, the interaction of variables within environmental, biological and psychological systems must be taken into account to provide a new "holistic" insight.

#### 4.3.3 Two years after divorce - empirical studies

According to Hetherington, the second year after divorce "appeared to be a period of marked recovery and constructive adaptation for divorced mothers and children", a view which is corroborated by Wallerstein and Kelly, who note that a year after their initial assessment seemed to reveal "the efforts at mastery that had been taking place. A majority of the youngsters had resumed their earlier developmental pace" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:162).

It is notable, however, that in both studies at two years after divorce at all stages of development except for adolescence seemed to display far greater resilience than in boys in their recovery (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:1980, Guibaldi and Perry, 1985:535; Hetherington et al, 1979:45). In the substudy of the latter project where the children's affect was manipulated in terms of quality of play, it is stated that while, by the second year, fragmented and immature play patterns were evident in the boys together with "hostile and more anxious and less happy affect", the girls no longer seemed affected (Hetherington et al, 1979:45).

#### 4.3.4 Two years after divorce - theoretical issues

The difficulty of assessing when psychological stress becomes psychological harm certainly raises the question of whether the layers of experience can, in fact be dissected and peeled off. Sroufe and Rutter (1984) speak of the unique adaptation "fit" (compare the concept of "goodness of fit" used by Thomas, 1981:603)) between the child and his environment and suggest the "tendency of the person to assimilate new environments to former patterns of adaptation ... (Sroufe and Rutter, 1984:23).

According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) "At what point relative fixity is reached is not always clear. With children the transition from acute to chronic is particularly difficult to establish" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:164). Certainly the manifestation of depression a year after parental divorce "calls for psychological or psychiatric intervention in order to prevent consolidation of symptoms which involve not only social development, but learning and emotional well-being" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:164).

#### 4.3.5 Five years after divorce - empirical studies

Unlike the initial reactions of the children, which had been clearly influenced by age and stage of development, or the responses at the first year reassessment, which seemed to be related to sex, the "more enduring" responses at five years "although still related somewhat to age and less so to sex",

were associated with unique configurations dependent upon the goodness of fit of each individual personality with his particular set of environmental circumstances, including parent-child relationships, custodial arrangements and relationships, and support systems (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:208).

Thirty-four percent of the children and adolescents appeared to be doing especially well at the five year mark (209), thirty-seven percent were moderately to severely depressed (211), while twenty-seven percent of the children seemed to be moderately well-adjusted but retaining islands of unhappiness or anger (213). Twenty-seven percent of the children, more than at the two year stage, were intensely lonely (212). There was very much less stability among the young children, the focus of our attention, and the older girls. (214) (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980).

#### 4.3.6. Six years after divorce - empirical studies

Studies by Hetherington (1985:529) and Kurdek et al (1981:537) assessing children's reactions six years after divorce, emphasize the "multi-dimensional character of the children's adjustment to divorce" (Kurdek et al, 1981:573), as had the study by Wallerstein and Kelly. Hetherington suggests that the pre-school child's ability to transcend the initial effects of divorce depends on the child's sex, family reorganization, factors such as remarriage and negative life experiences. "There is less continuity in the adjustment of children from divorced families than non-divorced families because of the greater probability they have of encountering multiple negative

life changes in such things as family relationships, mental and physical contact of family members, child care, geographic mobility and economic status". (Hetherington et al, 1985:529).

Guibaldi and Perry (1985) in their six year longitudinal study of 110 children, using multifactorial mental health assessment instruments found that divorced family children performed more poorly than intact family children on several indices, and that boys performed more poorly than did girls. Family income in contrast to I.Q. proved to be significant in predicting the socio-cognitive competence of the pre-schoolers in this investigation. The research team concluded "that a diverse range of parent behaviours and other environmental variables do relate to the child's ability to overcome potentially damaging effects" (Guibaldi and Perry, 1985:536), a conclusion which was not very different from those reached by both Wallerstein and Kelly (1985:208) Hetherington et al (1985:529), as well as Kurdek et al, (1981:573).

#### 4.3.7. Theoretical issues emerging from the above empirical studies

Kurdek et al (1981) point out that although in their study, few children showed impressive understanding and stability of feeling about the divorce, often surprising to their parents, these children still regarded the divorce "as painful and difficult and maintained strong loyalty to the predivorce family structure" (1981:571).

In this study, the positive growth towards stability is conceptualised in terms of "crisis theory", which would view the post-

separation period as involving a time of reorganization leading to a gradual but inevitable new level of equilibrium" (Kurdek et al, 1981:575). Hetherington too, suggests that the period after the second year post divorce involves a process of restabilization and adjustment (1978:174). While this process may be seen in part to lend support to the recency hypothesis as well as to the concept of plasticity, it may also be viewed in terms of systems theory.

For this is the process of equilibration, of progressive stabilization which differentiates an open system from a closed system. An open system is capable of morphogenesis, of adaptation, of competence, of coping and of flexibility in times of stress or dysynchrony of utilizing "changing information" from the environment to its advantage in order to develop and mature towards a higher level, instead of either regressing or remaining sterile, stagnant and defensive against change.

#### 4.3.8 Ten years after divorce - empirical studies

At present Wallerstein's (1984) and (1985) preliminary reports of her follow-up of the 1975 project describe the "most chronologically advanced and sophisticated longitudinal study yet, dealing respectively with those subjects who were aged 9 - 18 at the time of the initial assessment and those who, teenagers today, were then aged between 2½ and 6 years old.

An examination of the former paper (1984) reveals that although these children, pre-schoolers at the time of divorce, retained "few conscious memories of the intact family or of the marital

rupture ..... a significant number spoke sorrowfully of their emotional deprivation and wistfully of the more nurturant and more protected life that they had envisioned within the intact family" (Wallerstein, 1984:457).

More than half of the sample still fantasised about reconciliation of their parents. Their often close relationship with their custodial mother reflected appreciation concerning her struggles, concern for a future when they would leave home and she would be alone as well as anger at the fact that over the years she had so frequently been physically and emotionally unavailable (Wallerstein, 1984:457). Generally, however, their relationship with the non-custodial father was still of central importance and tinged with ambivalence (whether they saw him frequently or not). Girls, as they reached adolescence felt a particular need to "establish relationships with absent fathers" (Wallerstein, 1984:457).

The prevailing tone was optimistic, looking forward to marriage, to a family, some being concerned about repeating their parents' mistakes, most of them confident that they would be able to avoid the marital unhappiness that their parents had suffered (Wallerstein, 1984:457).

#### 4.3.9. Ten years after divorce - theoretical issues

The fact that these children, ten years after divorce seem ostensibly to have recovered, and, in spite of some simultaneous feelings of longing and regret to hold a positive view regarding marriage and divorce which had afforded them so much initial trauma and misery (Wallerstein, 1984:503)

has important theoretical implications.

Furthermore, it is necessary to note that the adolescent group which had, in contrast to the pre-school group, been considered to have coped particularly well within a year of the divorce (Wallerstein, 1984:503), after a period of ten years, regard "their parents' divorce as a continuing major influence in their lives", are apprehensive about repeating their parents' mistakes and have a relatively "fixed identification with being a child of divorce" (1985:554).

#### 4.3.9.1 Relationship of trends ten years after divorce to developmental hypotheses

The outcome trends in two groups tend to contradict, at least in part, some of the hypotheses which have been proposed concerning age, developmental stage and trauma, and which seemed previously to be valid. It does not appear, for instance, that Wallerstein's observations provide evidence even partly in support of the cumulative effect hypothesis as Kalter and Rembar (1981:86) had suggested; for children who experience divorce at the pre-school stage, although initially extremely vulnerable, appear to have handled the trauma far more effectively than those who had been adolescents when their parents parted. Nor, for this reason, can the critical stage hypothesis be seen to have been substantiated in this study. Evidence for the recency hypothesis may be seen in the pre-school group, on the whole, and in some of the adolescents who seemed to have overcome the stress within a year. In others, the process of early reintegration seems to have been reversed when, towards the ten year reassessment period signs

of distress re-emerged.

Maccoby's (1983) hypotheses (see page 26-27) regarding socio-emotional development and vulnerability, though borne out in the reactions of the pre-school group, cannot be said to have been validated by the adolescent group. Certainly, vulnerability to stress does not seem to increase or decrease with age in a linear fashion and it has repeatedly been shown that a supportive and stable environment should reduce the child's vulnerability to stress.

We also know that, as the child's coping repertoire increases he is less likely to need to rely on a primary caregiver or on a primary attachment figure under stressful conditions. Furthermore, in accordance with his socio-cognitive development, he is able, not only to move from dependence to independence, from an external locus of control to an internal locus of control, but also from an egocentric view to a more sympathetic awareness of the standpoints of others, from concrete operational cognitive strategies to formal operations where he is more easily able to reflect, to assess and to construct more "planful cognitive strategies" (Maccoby, 1983),

#### 4.3.9.2. Relationship of outcome trends ten years after divorce to "structural readiness"

Perhaps the different responses of the two groups could be interpreted according to Kagan's concept of "structural readiness". Kagan stated that "we must always expect an interaction between the event and the psychological surface

it strikes" (Kagan, 1983:212).

In the case of the pre-school child, because the crisis of the divorce process strikes and interacts with a relatively undeveloped psychological surface without a repertoire of appropriate cognitive coping devices, including the ability to distance from self, to see another perspective and to rationalise, the initial effects were disruptive. When, however, the child was living in a supportive environment, and enabled, in the course of maturation to overcome the emotional impact and to develop new strategies in order to cope adequately with the absorbing business of concrete operations (his manipulation of the concrete world) before he reached adolescence, he managed on this relatively firm developmental foundation to forge this identity anew, unfettered by past conscious memories of family disruption, testifying to the notion of "plasticity", the regenerative capacity of the child.

The psychological surface of the adolescent, however, was possibly already disturbed by interparental hostility before the divorce. At an age when memories remained relatively fresh and possibly constantly revived in processes of formal operations such as hypothesizing, and attempting to see various perspectives, the child was probably able to avoid facing the misery by "strategic withdrawal" channeling his activities away from home (Wallerstein and Kelly, in Anthony and Koupernik, 1974:594) by denial and rationalisation. He could not, however, forget, since his very process of identity-formation at this stage of his parents' separation was so closely bound up and trapped in marital misery. Consequently, he was possibly inhibited in

attempting to develop more adequate coping techniques.

4.3.9.3. The problem of individual differences in outcome trends ten years after divorce

However, as Wallerstein points out, one of the most puzzling issues in this type of research is the "perplexing individual difference and variation in response to what appear to be similar stressful experiences" (Wallerstein, 1984:445).

This issue is relevant to two other problems raised by Wallerstein. Firstly, the fact that divorce is "not a simple, circumscribed event but a multistage process of radically changing family relationships" (Wallerstein, 1984:445), and, secondly, that divorce involves physical, social and economic changes which involve widely pervasive repercussions. Because of the plethora of constantly changing variables and interactions among the variables it is highly unlikely that life stresses such as divorce (which should rather be conceptualised as dysynchronies, in order to capture the dialectic dynamic) should be experienced in a similar way, or should invoke identical reactions in children. Indeed, the task of prediction and of insight, the *raison d'être* of clinical research, could become well-nigh impossible if we do not overlook the importance of relating our questions and our findings to some theoretical focus.

Some of the crucial research questions raised are:

- why are some children more vulnerable and others more competent?
- what reactions should we expect at certain developmental stages?
- what sort of interventions are appropriate to prevent or alleviate the child's distress at various stages of his development?

4.3.9.4. The problem of links between developmental stages and adjustment in outcome trends ten years after divorce

Certainly, Wallerstein's (1984) study poses important challenges and yields crucial insights. It is crucial from a theoretical as well as from a practical perspective that "patterns of behavior and psychological configurations discerned at any cross-sectional vantage point inevitably highlight that which is most salient at that developmental life stage and may obscure significant patterns of behavior that may become prominent at a subsequent stage" (1984:444).

As Sroufe and Rutter (1984) have explained, "With development, earlier forms of behavior become hierarchically integrated within more complex forms of behaviour, but nevertheless still remain potentially active" (Sroufe and Rutter, 1984:21).

Thus, in Wallerstein's ten-year follow-up studies some light has been thrown upon the theoretical question of expectable continuity in development, especially as regards links between early childhood experience and subsequent psychological development" (Wallerstein, 1984:445).

From a practical point of view we can no longer be complacent about the adjustment of the adolescent to the divorce process. He needs appropriate support in order "to work through" and come to terms with the trauma of his parents' divorce, while in the case of the pre-schooler what seems to be necessary is support for the custodial parent and counselling with regards to parent/child interaction.

#### 4.3.9.5. The links between Bronfenbrenner's model and the divorce process, research and intervention

Furthermore, both on the level of intervention and of research it is necessary to think in terms of the dialectic model of development and Bronfenbrenner's dimensions, and to take into account, from a research, theoretical and intervention perspective, the complex interlocking functions "relative to divorce" which Wallerstein (1984:445) has named "this multi-stage process of interlocking relationships".

#### 4.3.10. Adjustment in adulthood as related to the experience of parental divorce in childhood

Two studies of adult adjustment as affected by parental divorce will be discussed and, although they do not necessarily specifically focus on the time or stage during which the divorce took place these studies do provide useful information both from the point of view of methodology and results.

#### 4.3.10.1. Cross-sectional study by Kulka and Weingarten (1979)

Although, unlike the studies by Wallerstein (1984), Hetherington (1985), and Guibaldi and Perry (1985), this study by Kulka and Weingarten (1979) is based on cross-sectional rather than longitudinal data, the general conclusion that the stressful impact of parental divorce endures throughout life (Kulka and Weingarten, 1979:56) is consistent with the outcome of Wallerstein's ten year study as well as that by Wadsworth and Maclean (1986).

However, in spite of their findings that young adults from divorced backgrounds "tend to be more likely to report symptoms of ill-health" (59) and that males in particular, experience difficulty in handling stress, Kulka and Weingarten conclude that, on the whole, "the long-term effects of coming from a home broken by parental divorce appear to be both minimal and at least potentially modifiable, although discovery of the process by which such modification may occur will clearly require additional (and longitudinal) research" (Kulka and Weingarten, 1978:62).

#### 4.3.10.2 The study by Wadsworth and Maclean (1986)

This study, reporting on available cross-sectional and longitudinal data and examining the long-term impact of parental divorce on children's life chances, paints a much bleaker picture.

It was found that not only was the family income almost certain to be reduced in the short term, but that children of divorced

families were more likely than children from intact families to have episodes of emotional disturbance such as bedwetting.

Furthermore, those children who experienced parental divorce before they were aged five were "more than usually vulnerable to certain kinds of criminal offences", to hospital treatment for psychosomatic and emotional disorders, more prone to the risk of an illegitimate pregnancy. There was also evidence of lower educational attainment and lower economic achievement in males in their mid-twenties following experience of parental divorce or separation before the age of fourteen years (Wadsworth and Maclean, 1986:155).

#### 4.3.11. Theoretical implications emerging from empirical studies on adult adjustment of children of divorce

Thus it seems that, in some populations, such as the upper middle class in Wallerstein's study and Kulka and Weingarten's study, respectively, the concept of plasticity does appear to operate in developmental adaptation to stress. This plasticity, however, should not only be seen in terms of an inherent biological capacity but also in terms of morphogenesis, the process by which a system, in this case the "child system", develops new structures in order to adapt to the influence of the new environment (translated from Schoeman et al., 1983:13). Indeed the concept of synchrony/dysynchrony within the dialectical developmental model offers an even more dynamic perspective where divorce is seen as a breakdown in the synchrony; the mutually facilitative progressions of, or, according to Bronfenbrenner's model, the

macrosystem, the exosystem, the mesosystem and the microsystem. This breakdown gives rise to "conflicts or crises, which generate dialectical tension from which further development derives" (Gerrity et al ., in Walker and Roberts, 1983:51).

However, a population with few support networks or opportunities for development or change such as the British working class (until recently) was a relatively "closed" population which had no desire for advancement or improvement in the educational sphere, or to reform its high crime rate. This population could be seen to be in a state of morphostasis, attempting (in spite of deterioration and disintegration) to maintain the status quo rather than to grow and develop.

#### 4.3.12. Methodological implications arising from studies of adult adjustment of children of divorce

As Kulka and Weingarten (1979) have pointed out "The inferences which may be drawn from the analysis of data from cross-sectional studies are not quite the same as those which one might draw from a longitudinal study of the same individuals followed over a period of years" (Kulka and Weingarten, 1979:53).

While analyses of data from a sequence of cross-sectional surveys of the same population may provide evidence concerning aggregate characteristics or changes in relationships among variables, it cannot allow for analyses of patterns of individual change. Furthermore, even patterns of "social change" may

reflect factors such as changes in population composition or certain cultural trends in a given population group at a given time" (Kulka and Weingarten, 1979:53).

Thus, we must constantly be aware of the differences both in the methodological approach as well as in the sample population of various studies and we must take into consideration how these differences affect and reflect their data and the strengths and limitations of these differences. It is important to realise that Wallerstein's study, using the "clinical method" of the assessment interview was based in a white, upper middle-class population and that, consequently, the results of their study cannot be generalised without replication on a more heterogeneous population.

Furthermore, the very nature of the clinical method, lends itself to subjectivity and bias, and cannot be replicated with scientific rigour. However the valuable qualitative perspective afforded by these studies was deliberately selected by the team.

"We chose to pursue an avowedly hypothesis-generating search, one built of the fullest possible exploration of the 'experience of divorce' for all its participants. The perspectives this study would generate could later, we trust become the subject of a more definitive hypothesis-testing study, one that paid attention to the specific controls necessary to the hypotheses at issue" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:9).

Both Kurdek (1981:576) and Kulka and Weingarten (1979:53) point out the limitations of self-report measures, while the former noted the differences between parents' reports and accounts given by children (1981:575). Furthermore, Kurdek et al (1981:577) found in their study that their measures of child adjustment were inappropriate since they weighed too heavily in favour of behavior skills and attitudes that are characteristic of older children. Guibaldi's (1984) utilization of parent and teacher assessments of appropriate behaviour and happiness and his measure of "work effort" needed stringent controls to counteract teacher bias and parent projection, while measures of psychological adaptation or mental health need to be carefully evaluated not only for appropriateness but for criterion validity, a difficult task in view of the virtual impossibility of operationalising these concepts.

As Kulka and Weingarten have indicated (1979:53) we dare not overlook the nature of the population forming the sample in the study; for, as has been shown, the fact that the data used in the Wadsworth and Maclean study was derived exclusively from the working class which has a characteristic work ethic and educational values as well as socio-economic conditions, must perforce have biased the trends which emerged.

Huntingdon (1985) points out that no single class of measures would be adequate to answer the questions addressed in divorce research, an area which involves "the complexity of adaptational processes, with developmental transformations

and transactional impacts and sequences being more the rule than the exception" (1985:586).

It is necessary to use "multiple data gathering methods selected from different classes of methods, each with its own vulnerabilities. This approach is needed to establish convergent validity and, even more strongly, it is needed to 'finesse' 'the threats to validity to which the various classes of methods are susceptible'. The problem is to choose and devise sets of measures that altogether transcend one another's methodological vulnerabilities" (Huntingdon, 1985:586).

The studies by Hetherington and Associates (1985) are perhaps the best example of multimodal projects which are able to tap the multiple dimensional transactions arising in the life of the child from the process of parental divorce and subsequent father absence. However, the contributions to the field by studies utilising less complex methodologies should not be ignored as long as their limitations in scope and conceptualization are taken into account.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEVELOPMENTAL  
ADJUSTMENT, DIVORCE AND CONCOMITANT  
FATHER ABSENCE

5.1 THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS IN  
STUDIES OF CHILDRENS ADJUSTMENT TO FATHER ABSENCE/DIVORCE

Hetherington points out that her 1985 paper "examines life changes only as a mediator of developmental outcomes for children" (1985:530).

In the end, as Sroufe and Rutter (1984) have pointed out, the questions asked about life changes, such as divorce and father absence should be focused on the understanding of "processes underlying both continuity and change in patterns of adaptation", rather than simply establishing links between pathology, or deficits and earlier or later behavior (Sroufe and Rutter, 1984:12 ).

How does earlier adaptation (for instance, the child's initial reaction to divorce/father absence) leave the individual vulnerable to, or, to an extent, immunized against particular types of stress?

How do adaptive patterns such as developmental tasks, at

different periods of development interact with a changing external environment (or a physiology) to produce subsequent adaptation or coping?

What mechanisms yield pathological or inflexible patterns as opposed to flexible adaptive patterns and how are these mechanisms transformed in the course of development?

Biller (1982) points out that there "is a surprisingly vast literature on the alleged effects of father absence" which like the literature on divorce, is "often seemingly disparate and fragmented" (Biller, in Lamb, 1982:490).

A great deal of this literature has continued the attempt to draw linear causal relationships between divorce/father absence and high risk of child maladjustment in spite of the seminal admonition by Herzog and Sudia (in Caldwell and Riccuti, 1973:141) and in many studies there is only nebulous information on such factors as the age of the subject or the time of divorce (Kinard and Reinherz, 1984:92; Berg and Kelly, 1978:21; Levitin, 1979:3).

Certainly the questions posed above by Sroufe and Rutter, can neither be conceptualized nor answered within a unidimensional research tradition. Thus we will confine our attention to some studies which have raised some interesting issues with regard to the influence of divorce/father absence at the pre-school stage.

- on the subsequent development of girls and boys
- on the subsequent psycho-sexual development of boys and girls
- on subsequent socialisation.

And we will bear in mind that "in seeking to understand the development and manifestation of patterns of maladaptation .... (we must) also understand developmental aspects of successful adaptation" (Sroufe and Rutter, 1984:11).

## 5.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHER ABSENCE DUE TO DIVORCE AND THE PSYCHOSEXUAL DEVELOPMENT OF BOYS AND GIRLS.

### 5.2.1. Problems emerging from studies.

Blechman (1982:184) has drawn attention to the dubious concurrent and predictive validity of many sex-role measures such as projective picture or doll-play tests of sex-role development. Not only is the premise questionable that "healthy masculine behaviour is signified by aggressive projective responses" (Blechman, 1982:184), but the findings both of these measures as well as measures of self-report and measures of observation are open to very different interpretations.

For instance, Hetherington's findings that adolescent girls in divorced father absent homes are more aggressively seductive (Hetherington, 1972:318) should be considered carefully in the light of the fact that these were girls from lower-class families with possibly different mores from those of both reader and research team.

(Although it appears (Hetherington, 1972:324) that the mothers of these girls "offered their daughters appropriately feminine models" - albeit at the interview.)

#### 5.2.2 Findings : Psychosexual adjustment of boys

Generally, the findings indicate that divorce/father absence particularly when occurring when the child is very young, has more adverse, long-term effects on boys than on girls (Hetherington et al., 1985:528; Guibaldi et al, 1985:535; Wallerstein, 1984:447). It must be pointed out that the important study by Santrock, "Effects of father absence on sex typed behaviour in male children: reason for the absence and age of onset of the absence" has been omitted because of the doll-play measures. Boys were rated as more disobedient but less aggressive when father-absence occurred at an early age.

##### 5.2.2.1. The influence of prevailing attitudes on boys' reactions

In Hetherington's study, the children had been pre-schoolers when the divorce occurred and the general patterns of behaviour for boys, six years after the divorce, was externalising i.e. aversive opposition, destruction of property, verbal aggression and physical aggression. Although it was two years after divorce, boys had displayed more feminine sex role preferences and sex role orientation, and play activities more frequently involved girls (Hetherington, 1979, cited by King and Kleemeier in Walker and Roberts, 1983:1262-3).

It is worth noting Hetherington's (1979:43) observation that adults and peers are less supportive of boys than of girls in their attempts to cope with stress, an observation which had already been made in the assessment of parent-child interactions during her initial study (1978:174).

The reason for this negative attitude towards boys may be associated with a belief that "sex role standards cause people to perceive girls as requiring more support in times of stress and that signs of emotional neediness are less acceptable in boys" (Hetherington, 1979:43).

Thus, the fact that boys who had initially been labelled in a negative fashion were perceived and responded to more positively by both peers and teachers when changing schools, suggests that because of this strong reciprocal and interactive dynamic of child and milieu the hitherto believed delayed adjustment of boys in divorce as opposed to girls may be more a function of interaction with the environment than any inherent male deficit.

#### 5.2.2.2. The importance of a male authority model

Indeed, it seems as if the sex, if not of the custodial parent, of some authority figure such as a step-father is crucial to the adequate development of the boy (Santrock and Warshak, 1979:121; Hetherington, 1985:529).

Whether the boy needs a male figure as a disciplinarian to

comparative better adaptation of girls in mother-headed families as compared to boys in the Hetherington (1985:535) and Wallerstein (1984:447) studies cited above.

Thus Hetherington's finding that the stepfathers often find difficulty with stepdaughters who see them as intruders in their close relationship with their custodial mother is not surprising (1985:529).

#### 5.2.3.2. Ambivalent attitude towards father/male figures

However, it is possible to hypothesize that this stepfather-daughter relationship would be fraught with ambivalence. Hetherington's (1972:316) earlier study had shown adolescent daughters of early divorce to "report more negative attitudes towards the (biological) father .. more conflict with the father" (Hetherington 1972:316) and less belief in the competence of their father than daughters of widows or daughters of intact families. Yet these girls, although more clumsy, sought more attention from male adults and initiated more proximity seeking ... spent more time in male areas "than girls from intact or widowed families (1972:316).

Hetherington suggests that with daughters as well as with sons "the first 5 years of life represents a critical period for the impact of father absence on children" (1972:324).

#### 5.2.3.3. Initial and short-term reactions to divorce/father absence

In Wallerstein and Kelly's study although at one year after divorce (18 months after separation) girls had fared significantly worse than boys (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:615) they seemed to recover by two years according to Wallerstein and Kelly and Hetherington et al) and demonstrated a greater resilience than their brothers (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975:615; Hetherington et al, 1978:170).

As we have seen, parent-child interactions (Hetherington et al, 1978:168) as well as the more appropriate bond between mother and daughter during latency years (Hetherington et al, 1985:529) Santrock and Warshak, 1979:121) contribute to the girls' progressive adjustment.

#### 5.2.3.4. Long-term adjustment of adolescent girls to father absence

However, it is interesting to note the "heightened need of the adolescent girls to establish relationships with absent fathers" ten years after the divorce (Wallerstein, 1984:457).

For all these children, pre-schoolers at the time of the divorce, "relationships with the non-custodial father had returned their emotional centrality" (457) whether they maintain frequent contact with children or not. Feelings were ambivalent but intense (457).

#### 5.2.3.5. The effect of father absence on sex role self-esteem

A recent cross-sectional study by Kalter et al (1985) compared

three groups of girls each consisting of girls from intact and divorced families. Study I, of elementary school girls where divorce had taken place at the pre-school age, explored self-concept and academic achievement. Study II, of adolescents where divorce had taken place at the latency stage and Study III, of college women where the girls were adolescents at the time of divorce both investigated masculinity and femininity as well as self-rating behaviour.

It was found that the most significant differences in attitudes between girls from divorced and intact families occurred at adolescence, that in none of the developmental stages was parental marital status associated with levels of cognitive development or academic achievement and that although there was no relationship between global self-esteem and parents' marital status, "selected areas of self-esteem were less positively developed" among daughters of divorce compared to their peers from an intact family background (1985:543).

These findings are all the more interesting because of their cross-sectional methodology, although the fact that different measures were used in each of the studies could be criticized.

Kalter et al (1985) point out how the lower perceived social and physical competence scores obtained in Study I could indicate that "disruption in family life and the lack of centrally involved father has a particularly negative effect on subsequent social and physical self concept when the girl is a younger pre-schooler" (Kalter et al, 1985:324; Kalter and Rembar, 1981:99).

The fact that daughters of divorce although non-delinquent at adolescence were "more likely to report having participated in behaviors associated with delinquency" and were more prone to using drugs, might suggest "a greater degree of conflict and/or a greater tendency to express conflict in action among daughters of divorce", as well as a greater willingness "to represent themselves in negative ways" (1985:541). It is important to note the absence of information regarding interparental conflict, availability of non-custodial father and the nature of pre-divorce relationships, data which could have contributed further significant insights.

Again, these findings are relevant to those of Hetherington (1972:324) and Wallerstein (1984:457; 1985:551) which indicated more oppositional and acting out behaviour among certain groups of girls at adolescence and a greater overt need for a male figure, coupled with anger, aggression and ambivalence.

Furthermore, the fact that ostensibly well-adjusted college women "were less sanguine about the future and uncertain about the permanency of marriage" may be related to Wallerstein's findings in her college groups (Wallerstein 1985:553) where parents had divorced while the girls were adolescents.

Finally, the negative concept of femininity held by girls in the divorced group has implications not only for how women are perceived generally but for their feminine concept" (Kalter et al 1985:543) while their view of men as unfeeling and weak does not augur well for happy and lasting sexual or marital relationships in the future.

Indeed, it is not surprising that in the Kulka and Weingarten's study (1979:70) women from divorced backgrounds seem "somewhat more invested in parenting" than in the role of wife and partner. Kalter et al (1985) integrating, psycho-analytic theory and findings derived from studies of sex role development suggest that the father plays a key role in the healthy psycho-sexual development of his child not only by being her "ally" in the separation-individuation process from her mother, but also by serving as a "source of masculine bred self-esteem accepting and valuing her femininity" (Kalter et al, 1985:543). Thus Kalter et al (1985) point out how an understanding of the optimal adaptation developmental process can permit some insight into potential problems, their relevance to stage of development and their manifestation (Kalter et al, 1985:543).

However, this perspective is only one dimension of the child's multi-dimensional life-world.

Hetherington (1972:324) speculates as to the role of the divorced mother in influencing her daughter's attitudes. Factors such as inter and intra-physical functioning, custody, economic and cultural variables, are all important interacting components which are impossible to disentangle in the child's existence, as indeed it is impossible to separate factors such as sex role development from cognitive and social functioning.

### 5.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIVORCE/FATHER ABSENCE AND SOCIO-COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

#### 5.3.1. Methodological problems

According to Blechman (1982) "The principal difficulty in attempts to reject the null hypothesis (of no difference between children reared by one or two parents) is that the independent subject variables, number of parents, and cause of parent-absence are naturally entangled with a profusion of conditions known to influence child development" (Blechman, 1982:180).

It is becoming more apparent that cognition is merely a construct employed for the sake of convenience to separate so-called thinking activities from social and emotional dimensions. The development of language, and of intellect cannot be disentangled from the child's social and emotional milieu. Indeed, to speak of cognitive development in terms of I.Q. and achievement is reductionist and simplistic.

Shinn (1978) in her review of the fifty-four studies on father absence and children's cognitive development notes that of the 28 that met the criteria of methodological adequacy 16 showed detrimental effects of father absence, 9 found no significant effects and 3 found positive or mixed effects" (1978:296, 312). She goes on to deal with the various methodological problems including definition of terms, father absence, its length, child's age and/or sex, lack of control over factors such as

A brief examination of some of the more reliable studies in the field will suffice to indicate that cognitive development which should be considered rather as "socio-cognitive development" extends far beyond an operationalization into I.Q. or achievement scores and that the attempt to connect father absence and cognitive development in a simplistic fashion has jammed many research efforts into the linear causal paradigm.

5.3.2. Empirical studies on socio-cognitive adjustment to father absence

5.3.2.1. Father absence detrimental before age of five years

Both Blanchard and Biller (1971:302) and Santrock (1972:456) controlled and avoided two of the most glaring methodological errors in the field, namely, neither specifying the type of father absence nor the age of the child at the onset of father absence. Blanchard and Biller found that father absence (largely due to divorce) before the age of five years was detrimental to the academic performance (measured in achievement scores) of boys (1971:302).

5.3.2.2. Differential adjustment of boys and girls to father absence/divorce

Santrock showed that the most debilitating age for father absence due to divorce, desertion or separation for both boys and girls was in the first two years of life. Generally, the effect of father absence due to divorce was worse for boys than for girls

except in the 0 - 5 onset period when girls seemed to be more severely affected. Furthermore, while "father-absent boys" performed significantly better when there was a step-father, the presence of a step-father seemed to affect girls' performance detrimentally (Santrock, 1972:467).

#### 5.3.2.3 The mediating effect of social influence on cognitive development

It is significant that the achievement scores rather than the I.Q. scores were influenced strongly in Santrock's comparisons of onset of father-absence with father presence, which together with the different impact of stepfathers on girls and boys, led Santrock to contend that "cognitive changes are affected strongly by social influence ... Focus should be on the mediating process involved in father separation ..." (Santrock, 1972:468).

Indeed, one would go further and question to what extent achievement scores should be regarded as falling between the cognitive and social realms than "purely cognitive measures" and to what extent it is at all possible to find "purely cognitive measures".

For example, an examination of Hetherington's (1978) data (cited by Biller, 1982:509, in Lamb, 1982, and cited by King and Kleemeier, 1983: 1264) indicated that early father absence can impede cognitive development in boys. Boys (5 - 6 years old) from families which

had been divorced and father-absent for two years scored significantly lower than boys from intact families on the Block Design, Mazes and Arithmetic Subtests of the WIPSI and achieved lower Performance Scale Intelligence scores.

Low scores of these students would tend to indicate insecurity, impulsivity and lack of concentration (Glazer and Zimmerman, 1972:53, 84 and 104) while a disparity between Verbal and Performance Scale with a low Performance Scale score could indicate "mental or emotional disturbance" (Maloney and Ward, 1980:380). These results cannot be said to reflect purely cognitive development, particularly in view of Hetherington's (1978) concurrent data on poor parent-son, particularly mother-son interactions.

Indeed, a more recent study by Svanum and Bringle (1982) which attempted to investigate the effects of father-absence on educational achievement (using WISC and WRAT scores) and on the intellectual development of 5493 father-present and 616 father-absent White and Black children (aged 6 - 11), found that, following statistical control for SES, (Socio Economic Status), no decrements for father-presence/absence were discerned but some significant increments were found to be associated with children from fatherless families. Svanum and Bringle (1982) also noted an important but unclear link between SES and I.Q. While it seemed clear, according to Svanum and Bringle (1982) that SES is correlated with I.Q., "it was not clear to what extent changes in family SES result in changes in a child's

cognitive development " (Svanum and Bringle, 1982:140).

They concluded that "father absence, when used as an index variable which is assumed to represent underlying psychosocial and familial processes, is inconsistently and often weakly related to cognitive development in children" (Svanum and Bringle, 1982:143).

#### 5.3.2.4 Inadequate methodology

Certainly, it would seem that one of the difficulties with Svanum and Bringle's study and many others dealing with father absence is exemplified in the conclusions made in the study by Kinard and Reinherz (1984) which yielded inconsistent findings concerning the effects of the timing of parental divorce on children's psychological adjustment. According to the researchers, its methodology was inadequate because it tried to isolate crude differences rather than processes.

Thus, the results could not indicate dynamics such as conflict within intact families although the effect of such conflict would cancel out any differences between the divorced and intact groups.

#### 5.4 PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILIAL PROCESS

##### 5.4.1 Problems and limitations in investigating family dynamics and process

In a study of divorce and father absence, perhaps one of the most crucial factors which should be steadily borne in mind is Rutter's conclusion that "it is the ongoing disturbance in family relationships, rather than the family breakup as such, which does most of the damage" (Rutter, 1977:60; Emery, 1982: 913; Rosen, 1979:25). Indeed, Hetherington (1985) has stated that "the quality of family relationships may be more important than life changes in moderating the outcome of divorce and remarriage" (Hetherington, 1985:530).

##### 5.4.2 Towards an appropriate methodology for understanding psychosocial development and familial process

###### 5.4.2.1 Hess and Camara (1979)

This study, which focuses on process as well as structure, makes a significant methodological contribution by using a research strategy that examines differences within groups rather than merely testing for differences between groups. It revealed that the family relationships which emerge after divorce are possibly more significant than the divorce itself and that children's continuing relationship with both parents has more impact on their well-being than the parental discord (Hess and Camara, 1979:94).

#### 5.4.2.2 Wallerstein's (1984, 1985) longitudinal study

We have traced Wallerstein and Kelly's account of the effects of divorce occurring at the pre-school stage of the child's life from the initial impact, at one year, five years and ten years after divorce. This is a personalized phenomenological qualitative view of the psychological dynamics which, although difficult to replicate and to validate according to the "scientific" paradigm is a dimension of "truth" warranting careful consideration.

However, many of the scientific studies purporting to investigate effects of the divorce/father absence in the psychosexual or cognitive development of the child have been found to have limitations, because the perspective of empirical scientific tradition neither asked questions nor possessed the methodological finesse to answer questions about psychological processes. Furthermore, while Wallerstein and Kelly have certainly taken account of the relationship between the child and the various systems - family, school, community, legal, economic, which interact with the child in his life-world, the scientific empirical paradigm has been more confined in its scope.

#### 5.4.2.3 Cognition, SES and parenting: Guibaldi and Perry (1984)

With the study of Guibaldi and Perry (1984) we move full circle, back to an investigation of the effects of divorce and single-

parent status on the pre-schooler's mastery of developmental tasks, which are regarded in this study as the cognitive and social competencies necessary for coping with school. It has been found in many studies that "females had a substantial decrease in income following divorce" (Day and Bahr, 1986:83; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980:42; Burman and Barry, 1984:5).

Guibaldi and Perry attempted to probe further in order to determine to what extent a decline in SES (which seems to be a concomitant of divorce) affects the child's socio-cognitive development. When placed in this perspective, socio-cognitive development becomes a function not only of the family and home systems, but also of the school and economic systems.

Unlike Svanum and Bringle (1982:137) who broadly defined SES in terms of family income and education of the head of the household, the prediction variable in the Guibaldi and Perry study was based on a seven point scale of father's occupational status, father and mother's education (on a six point scale) as well as mother's full time, part-time or no employment (on a three point scale). Whereas Svanum and Bringle used only the Vocabulary and Block subtests of the WISC and the Reading and Arithmetic subtests of the WRAT to assess cognitive development (1982:137), Guibaldi and Perry utilized a range of tests including the Peabody Vocabulary Test, Bender Visual-Motor Gestalt Test, WRAT (reading and arithmetic), the Sells and Raff Scale of Peer Status, the Kohn Social Competence Scale and the

Vineland Social Maturity Scale.

Findings of the Guibaldi project have crucial implications for our understanding of the processes involved and consequently for intervention strategies. Firstly, not only do "children from divorced family homes enter school with significantly less social and academic competence than those from intact families" (466) but single parent status resulting from divorce also "predicts poor academic and social school entry competence in addition to and independent of SES" (467).

Secondly while SES appears to be associated in a general way with both intellectual and non-intellectual measure, single parent status appears to correlate with only the non-intellectual variables. Thus, while there was a negative relationship between achievement and social competence scores which included measures of initiative, co-operation and peer status and single parent status, I.Q. scores were unaffected (Guibaldi and Perry, 1984:467).

#### 5.4.2.4 The relevance of Hetherington's methodology and findings

The findings of Hetherington et al (1978) concerning parental interactions with pre-schoolers (1978:169) and the disparity between Performance and Verbal I.Q. scores and scores on subtests requiring concentration and reflectivity such as Arithmetic, Block Design and Mazes (cited by King and Klee-meier in Walker and Roberts, 1983:1264) would seem to be relevant; for they too, indicate that the pre-schooler is

under tremendous emotional pressure, that the interaction between mother and child is not conducive to his acquiring certain social competences and skills necessary for adjustment to the school system. Nor is his relationship with his mother facilitative to his orientation toward the learning and achievement milieu of school in spite of his inherent cognitive capacities. It is important to emphasize that Hetherington was able to arrive at her findings on the significance of parent-child interaction on children's cognitive performance because of the nature of her multi-level multi-perspectival methodology.

#### 5.4.3 Changes in quality of parenting as a result of divorce

Several studies have indicated that marital disruption may generate considerable personal distress and may require a period of readjustment to a fundamentally different lifestyle (Bloom, White and Asher, 1978:195; Weiss, and Spanier and Casto, in Levinger and Moles, 1979:205, 227) particularly when the disruption involves the responsibilities of single parenthood (Hetherington (1978:170). Both Hetherington (1978:171) and Patterson (1980:46-7) found that ratings for the self esteem and anxiety of divorced mothers and mothers in distressed but intact families, particularly in the latter, correlate significantly with ratings in their pre-school children's aggression and non-compliant behavior.

Furthermore, since pre-school children characteristically use "high rates of aversives as a means of producing parent inter-

action, play or attention" (Patterson, 1980:3), the mothers of children at this developmental stage are often more fatigued, more highly strung and more ineffectual than mothers of children at other stages of development.

#### 5.4.3.1 Belsky's (1984) model of parenting

According to Belsky's (1984:88) process model of the determinants of parenting there are three potential sources of stress or support in parenting. Firstly, the marital relationship which may serve as the principal support system for parents. The interactive support dynamic in parenting is conceptualized by Weinraub (1978) as "tension introduction", which is the notion that two parents complement one another in their contrasting interactions with the child. The "complementarity dynamic" has the function of optimizing the development of the child as long as it does not become a conflict dynamic (Weinraub, 1978:125). In the case of divorce this marital support element has been diminished.

A second stress or support factor in parenting is employment. The newly divorced single (female) parent very often has to go out to work for the first time. Dissatisfaction with conditions of employment and inconsistency in child-rearing have been associated by Yarrow et al (1962:122). Mothers who did not like work seemed to be less involved and interacted less with their children who in turn became more hostile and assertive with peers and less motivated in their schoolwork (Hoffman, 1974:144)

The third source of support is the social network, contact with friends, neighbours and relatives (1984:88).

#### 5.4.3.2 Social support networks, parenting and child development

Belsky (1984) cites Abernethy's findings (1973) that during the pre-school years the presence of a tightly knit social network is "positively associated with parents' sense of competence in the caregiving role" (Belsky, 1984:88).

McLanahan et al (1981), examining the relationship between network structure, social support and psychological well-being in the single parent family, found that benefits derived from supportive networks as compared with the stress suffered in the absence of such support were mediated by the role orientation of the mother, i.e. whether she was motivated either to change her social identity, to maintain the status quo or was not yet ready for change (McLanahan, 1981:609-610).

These attitudes of the mother are possibly associated with the stage she has reached in coping with the stress of divorce (see Kaslow's model, p. 112) as well as with her temperament and with her unique configuration of experience.

Belsky (1984:84) shows how parenting and, indirectly, child development is influenced not only by the interaction of the parent personality and child temperament, but also by interaction of the broader social context within which the

parent-child relationship is embedded, specifically marital relations and sequelae of the dissolution of these relations, such as custody, social networks and the occupational experiences of parents.

## 5.5 TOWARDS A NEW RESEARCH PARADIGM

Thus we find that changes in our understanding and conceptualization of the divorce process as it affects children and child development are gradually influencing the research paradigm. Instead of seeing divorce and father absence or single parenthood as an event which has linear causal repercussions, divorce is now understood to be "a process that unfolds over time. The changing developmental situation of the child must be seen as a transaction with the unfolding post divorce life of the parents" (Hetherington, 1985:583).

This view of divorce demands a longitudinal multi-method, multi-measure and multi-situation paradigm which has to do not only with general correlations between single variables, with events, outcome and impacts, "but with processes of complex interaction over time between individuals and their environment, with such long term processes as changing patterns of coping and of adaptation to stress" (Huntingdon, 1984:584). These patterns of synchrony and dysynchrony are inherent in the dialectical dynamic of development seen by Huntingdon as "a multi-directional process involving changing individuals in a changing world" (Huntingdon, 1984:584).

## CHAPTER SIX

TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK INTEGRATING THEORY AND RESEARCH ON  
THE CHILD'S ADAPTATION TO THE DIVORCE PROCESS AND CON-  
COMITANT FATHER ABSENCE, WITH A VIEW TO APPROPRIATE  
INTERVENTION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5 we traced the way in which changing conceptualizations of child development have influenced the evolution of a new research paradigm in the area of divorce emphasizing processes and interactions among various dimensions of the child's life-world. Thus, within the dialectical developmental framework we speak of adjustment in various ways to crises and stresses, of adaptations and reciprocal interactions rather than of linear cause and effect.

Kurdek (1981) states that because "divorce itself is a complex, cultural, social, legal, economic and psychological process ... children's divorce-related experiences need to be understood in terms of hierarchically embedded psychological, familial, social and cultural contexts" (1981:856).

Following Kurdek (1981:856) we shall attempt to use Bronfenbrenner's model (1979) (which places the above contrasts and dimensions within an ecological environment) in order to construct a framework within which to integrate theoretical and research issues as well as empirical findings regarding the adjustment of children to the divorce process.

Since the adjustment dynamic involves positive as well as negative adaptation, we shall also attempt to integrate some models of positive adaptation to stress. Garmezy's three models encompass alternative styles of coping with stress in general, while Kaslow's model and Wallerstein's tasks conceptualize the family and the child's respective progressive stages of working through the more specific stresses within the divorce process.

It must be emphasized that in order to preserve the dynamic interactive characteristics of the dialectical developmental model it is essential to utilize the cybernetic feedback component of systems theory and to realize that these interactions occur between many levels in the dimensions of the four systems, the macro, exo, micro and ontogenic systems and ramify between and throughout the systems in changes of space and time in the development of the child. Bronfenbrenner has, in fact, called this system of linkages, the "mesosystem".

## 6.2 THE MACROSYSTEM: BELIEF SYSTEMS AND IDEOLOGIES REGARDING FAMILY LIFE AND THE CHILD'S ADAPTATION TO THE DIVORCE PROCESS

Kurdek (1981:857) notes how the macrosystem involving cultural beliefs, ideas and attitudes, is itself changing and developing, so that "the individual organismic changes (of the child) must be seen within the context of larger social change."

Influences such as changing styles of parenting (Eiduson and Alexander, 1978:164) women's liberation, changes in attitudes

towards divorce (Kurdek, 1981:858) have all filtered through and influenced religious, legal and social mores and precedents.

I D Schäfer (1982) advocating reforms to the 1979 Divorce Act, cites from the Annual Report of the South African Law Commission (1975) as follows;

"The law must keep pace with developments in all spheres of life ... Changing circumstances require continuous adaptations in our law..." (Schäfer, 1982:242-3).

Kurdek notes that while contemporary changes in attitude have the potential for regarding the single-parent family as a non-pathological alternative to the single two-parent nuclear family, "divorce is still perceived as a social stigma ..." (Kurdek, 1981:858).

Indeed, Kitson, referring to the "long Judeo-Christian tradition of antipathy to marital dissolution" (Kitson, 1985:261), where divorce has been regarded as morally, socially and psychologically pathological, states that these attitudes are still prevalent. Filtering through the distress manifested by children of all ages at their parents' divorce is still the gnawing belief, grounded in the macro-system, that divorce is "abnormal" and "wrong".

### 6.3 THE EXOSYSTEM: ENVIRONMENTAL STABILITY AND EXTERNAL SOCIAL SUPPORTS AND THE CHILD'S ADAPTATION TO THE DIVORCE PROCESS

It is not difficult to realize how changes in the child's immediate environment and social supports consequent on parental divorce, the child's exosystem, reverberate not only with the microsystem, which includes intrafamilial relations but with the ontogenic system, the child's individual capacity for handling stress, as well as with the macrosystem.

The substantial decrease in the income of the mother-headed single-parent families (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1982:42; Burman and Barry, 1984:5; Day and Bahr, 1986:83), may be associated with incompetent parenting and poor socio-cognitive performance (Guibaldi and Perry, 1984:4670), i.e. with the meso and ontogenic systems. On the other hand, the economic plight of the single parent mother is related to the macrosystem with regard to the prevailing unequal pay structures for men and women.

Burman and Barry believe that "Not any structural changes in the society, but changes in public attitudes and girls' education are of crucial importance if equal pay legislation is to be passed " (Burman and Barry, 1984:45).

Maintenance, regarded by Burman and Barry (1984:19) as "notoriously unreliable as a source of income", and custody arrangements are crucial aspects of the divorce transaction. They are both a function of the legal system and of the

cultural milieu (macrosystem) which may be associated with the child's response to the divorce situation.

Referring to the South African legal situation with regard to divorce, Saayman and Saayman (1986: 50) note that the "adversarial system per se, generates interparental hostility that has a negative impact upon the psychological adjustment of children of divorce."

Hausen (1985), dealing with legal and psychological profiles in custody disputes, suggests that these families (in the United States) have been "failed by a legal system whose procedures are inadequate to limit burgeoning struggles of spousal conflict and to alter liability in parent-child relationships" (Hausen, 1985:2).

Johnston (1985) in a study of latency children in high-conflict post-separation and divorce families identified four response patterns in children to parental legal disputes which included anxiety, tension, depression as well as psychosomatic illness and deficits in moral development. "Each of these responses was progressively less adaptive and seemed to pose particular threats to the child's development and to have cumulative costs" (Johnston, 1985:573).

Undoubtedly, the adaptation of the child will be bound up with the nature and dispensations of the legal system (the exosystem) which itself is contingent upon the prevailing cultural milieu, the macrosystem.

#### 6.4 THE MICROSYSTEM: INTRAFAMILIAL PATTERNS EXPERIENCED BY THE CHILD AND HIS ADAPTATION TO THE DIVORCE PROCESS

##### 6.4.1 Post-divorce parenting patterns

The ongoing transactions between former spouses determine the nature of the parenting of children within the single-parent family system. Durst et al. (1985:425) have identified five types of parental partnerships in the mother-headed post-divorce families:

- Type I the mother and non-parent father
- Type II the mother and father friend
- Type III the mother and restricted father
- Type IV timesharing parents
- Type V coparents

This typology viewed, according to family systems theory as "five different adaptive efforts to the restructuring family boundaries after divorce" has considerable implications for the child's position in the family.

##### 6.4.2 Post-divorce visiting patterns

Kelly and Wallerstein (1977:54) note how the effects on factors associated with the divorce process, itself, tend to have a central influence on the visiting pattern that evolves. The quality and quantity of visiting patterns is inextricably connected with the residual and ongoing emotions of the members of the disrupted family, the anger of mother or father

malevolence, despair, attachment, vindictiveness which often do not take into account the feelings of the children.

Hingst (1981) found that "many of the mothers ... were unaware of the importance to these children of their father", and possibly, because of "the pain they were experiencing with respect to the divorce, are not as sensitive to signs of stress from their children as they would be under ordinary circumstances" (Hingst, 1981:164).

#### 6.4.3 Post-divorce mothering patterns

As Hetherington (1985:530) and Rutter (1985:46) have pointed out, it seems that the quality of family relationships may be more important than life changes in moderating the outcome of divorce. The quality of the mother-child relationship in particular, is central to the adjustment of the child. Bloom et al (1978:869-877) concluded that marital disruption was a stresser which precipitated psychopathology, motor vehicle accidents, alcoholism, changes in self-concept, anxiety, depression, anger and incompetence. Consequently the child "may be coping with a mother who is not only confronting many stresses, but who may be physically and psychologically less able to deal with adversity" (Hetherington, 1979:856).

We recall not only the escalatory cycle of mutual coercion which Hetherington found, particularly in the relationship between mothers and their pre-school sons, but the findings by Warshak and Santrock (1972:467) and Hetherington (1985:529) on the difficulties of small boys in the mother-custodial home,

as well as the study by Guibaldi and Perry (1984) on the association between single-parenthood and the pre-school child's socio-cognitive incompetence.

#### 6.4.4 Relationship of the quality of parenting with exo-, macro- and ontogenic systems

Both Belsky's (1984:88) conceptualization of the three potential sources of support for stress for parenting and the study by McLanahan (1981) on the relationship between network structures, social support and the well-being in the single parent mother-headed family point to the inextricable interactions between exo-, macro-, micro-, and ontogenic systems in the child's adjustment to the divorce process. According to Hetherington (1985) "There is less continuity in the adjustment of the children from divorced families than non-divorced family because of the greater probability they have of encountering multiple negative life-changes in such things as family relationships, mental and physical health of family members, child care, geographic mobility and economic status" (Hetherington, 1985:529).

#### 6.4.5 Kaslow's model of family adaptation to divorce (1984)

However, we must bear in mind that the human species has the capacity to adapt to stress or crisis, whether this capacity is conceptualized as morphogenesis within systems theory, dysynchrony within the dialectical developmental model or the concept of plasticity.

Kaslow (1984:26) has devised a process model of stages of the divorce process which indicates an evolutionary process of change and adaptation in the family system. By integrating the six station process delineated by Bohannon (1973) and Kessler's (1975) seven stage model, she showed how the family moves through the following 6 'stations',

Station I : Emotional divorce (as the predivorce period)

Station II : Legal divorce

Station III : Economic divorce

Station IV : Co-parent divorce and the problems of custody

Station V : Community divorce

Station VI : Psychic divorce

During the first four stations encompassing the pre- and pre-divorce stages, the family system experiences disillusionment, denial, erosion of self-concept and emotional integrity, ambivalence, separation, loss and mourning as well as uncertainty. However, after the divorce a process of stabilization gradually sets in, the station of community divorce, which involves feelings of indecisiveness, regret, sadness, resignation, curiosity and optimism. Eventually, during the post-divorce stage, the psychic divorce station may be reached during which the family embarks on a time of exploration and re-equilibration, associated with acceptance, self-confidence, a feeling of self-worth, independence and autonomy. In systems theory terms, the process of morphogenesis has taken place, for the family system has evolved to a higher level.

However, Wallerstein (1983:23) notes that successful stability and closure may never be reached in the post-divorce family.

"The family may remain fixated for years, at one or other stage in the state of transition or disequilibrium. The family's balance of unresolved conflict, of qualified support or non-support of the child's struggles, of continued deprivation or exploitation of the child all play a very formative role in helping the child's ultimate outcome" (Wallerstein, 1983:231).

## 6.5 THE ONTOGENIC SYSTEM: INTRA-INDIVIDUAL FACTORS FOR COPING WITH STRESS AND THE CHILD'S ADAPTATION TO THE DIVORCE PROCESS

### 6.5.1 Dialectical interaction

Wallerstein states that "the effects of the marital rupture are incorporated within the character, the attitudes, the relationships, the self-concept, the expectations and the world-view of the child... Over the course of time they are profoundly modified by the enfolding developmental stages and by subsequent life experiences and life decisions related and unrelated to events with the family" (1983:233).

It appears, therefore, that Wallerstein's findings have highlighted the fact that dialectical interactions between the various dimensions and systems in the child's life-world are more significant than the cause and effect of the linear causal paradigm.

### 6.5.2 Developmental status and adjustment

We have seen that developmental status has consistently been

associated with both quantity and quality of children's divorce adjustment. The child's socio-cognitive capacity will modulate his interpretation of events (Longfellow, in Levinger and Moles, 1979), while his coping strategies, determined by his socio-cognitive capacity, will modify the degree and intensity of his reaction (McDermott, 1968; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975; Hetherington, 1979).

Pre-schoolers are often viewed as the most vulnerable group of children because their level of cognitive development precludes a multiperspectival construction of the divorce process because their level of psychosexual development is at a crucial stage and because they are, as yet, both physically and psychologically involved with parents and family, not as yet having developed a separated and integrated identity.

Thus studies provide some support for both the cumulative effect and the critical state hypotheses (see p. 24-25) above, especially as the "marital rupture remains for many children the central event of their growing up years ..." (Wallerstein, 1983:233).

However, the ten year follow-up study by Wallerstein shows that, to some extent, both the recency hypothesis (see p. 25) and the concept of plasticity (p. 29-30) prevail. Over time, the acute responses of the pre-school child, the separation process, anxiety reactions, sleep disturbances and acute mourning receded (Wallerstein, 1984:252). Furthermore, the child who experienced divorce at the pre-school stage

seemed, according to Wallerstein's study (Wallerstein, 1984:457) to develop a more optimistic and resilient approach to marriage and indeed to life, than the child who experienced parental divorce at the adolescent stage.

#### 6.5.3 Sex of child and post-divorce adjustment

The relationship of sex of the child to post-divorce adjustment has been noted and, once again, although in the short-term pre-school boys appear to be more vulnerable (Hetherington, 1979; Wallerstein, 1985), the long-term follow-up studies by Hetherington (1985) and Wallerstein, as well as the studies by Kalter et al (1985) indicated that in the long-term pre-school girls who initially coped well seemed to manifest problems associated with sexual self-concept and attitudes to the opposite sex.

The complex nature of sex-associated stress in the post-divorce period is "likely to involve a complex reciprocal relation among children's developmental status and children's experiences of the custodial parent, parents' disciplinary practices, and the quality of available support systems" (Kurdek, 1981:860).

#### 6.5.4 Wallerstein's model of child adjustment to the divorce process

Wallerstein suggests that for the child the adjustment process to divorce may take many years (1983:230). In accord with Erikson's conception of life-tasks that are incorporated within the successive developmental stages (compare the Kubler Ross model of post-death coping stages and Kaslow's model of post-divorce family adaptation) Wallerstein has "conceptualized

the required adjustment of the child as a series of tasks to be addressed immediately as well as over the many years that follow" (1983:231).

These coping tasks (which may be considered in terms of the process of morphogenesis according to systems terms, dysynchrony according to the dialectical developmental model as well as in terms of plasticity) are seen to be hierarchical, following a particular time sequence initiated by the critical events associated with parental separation and culminating at late adolescence and young adulthood.

The six tasks are namely:

- Task 1 Acknowledging the reality of the marital rupture
- Task 2 Disengaging from parental conflict and reasoning customary pursuits
- Task 3 Resolution of loss
- Task 4 Resolving anger and self-blame
- Task 5 Accepting the permanence of the divorce
- Task 6 Achieving realistic hope regarding relationships (which Wallerstein sees as being achieved during adolescence)

Wallerstein (1983) notes how developmental stages may impede the resolution of, for instance, Task 1, when the pre-school child is "especially disadvantaged in grasping the meaning of divorce" because of "his limited grasp of time, of calendar, of space, of distance, of concepts such as marriage, separation and divorce..." (Wallerstein, 1983:235).

We have also noted how the child may find himself stuck within the family system's fixation in a particular stage of post-divorce evolution (Wallerstein, 1983:231).

Kurdek (1981) suggests that "Future examinations of ontogenic factors related to children's divorce adjustment need to be placed in a multivariate framework with an emphasis in age-related and interrelated child factors which are likely to carry more explanatory power than chronological age per se. Large scale longitudinal studies of non-clinical children and interview case studies of children in clinical settings need to be coordinated in an effort to isolate child orientated factors relevant to the short and long-term nature of children's divorce adjustment" (Kurdek, 1981:863).

## 6.6 THE MESOSYSTEM: INTERACTIONS AMONG THE VARIOUS SYSTEMS

### 6.6.1 Methodological and research implications of mesosystem

An analysis of the various levels associated with the child's adjustment to divorce, although of considerable heuristic value, does not, however, explain individual differences in reactions. As Kurdek (1981) points out, "Such explanations necessitate consideration of interactions among these various levels" (1981:803). And this focus on the mesosystem involves considerable methodological implications.

"Future researchers should not conceptualize component interactions in terms of static consistencies and regularities across time and context. Rather they should focus on parameters and trajectories of reciprocal change" (1981:863).

#### 6.6.2 Garmezy's stress model: a theoretical contribution

Discussing Garmezy's three model approach to stress resistance (see above p. 19) which encompasses a dynamic interaction between individual characteristics and the environment, Huntington favours the conditional model and suggests that there is a conditional relationship between the stress of divorce as a process, and the personal and social attributes of the individuals and families involved (Huntington, 1985:584), as indeed, between all the dimensions of the child's life-world.

#### 6.6.3 Interactions among various systems in the child's adjustment to the divorce process

It is almost impossible to assess which system within the environment should be given the most weight in a consideration of the child's adjustment process to divorce. Kurdek (1981) suggests that "Perhaps the most useful way to conceptualize the interrelations among the system is in terms of compensatory, or buffering relationships. Adequate financial support at the level of the exosystem, for example, may offset the stress of custodial parent-child relations at the level of the micro-system. Also the child's mature understanding and acceptance of the divorce and his or her sense of responsibility and

independence (all ontogenic system factors) may lessen the negative impact of the child of inadequate after-school programs (a microsystem factor).

Ultimately the relative importance of each system may depend in the specific patterning of the systems for each child. Certainly, there are multiple pathways to healthy divorce adjustment" (Kurdek, 1981:864).

#### 6.6.4 The dialectical developmental approach as an integrative framework for theory, research and intervention

It is thus apparent that a dialectical developmental framework affords not only some possibility of insight into individual processes, but also an insight into the opposite sides of the coin: both vulnerability to stress and resistance to, and coping with stress.

Hetherington (1979:857) criticized the research paradigm that has "viewed the single-parent family as a pathogenic family and has failed to focus on how positive family functioning and support systems can facilitate the development of social, emotional and intellectual competence in children in single-parent families ..."

She called for more research programs attempting to identify and facilitate patterns of family functioning as well as support systems that assist families to cope with the stress and to adjust to single-family status.

Efficient research and intervention programs must, however, be grounded in a carefully considered theoretical foundation which Wallerstein has seen in terms of "conceptual building blocks" (Wallerstein, 1983:242).

According to Sameroff (cited in Huntington, 1985:585) "... When change is seen to be the rule of development rather than the exception ... if a child's characteristics are seen as a consequence of an ongoing adaptation to a particular set of life circumstances, then we are offered a multiplicity of possibilities for changing these circumstances and thereby changing the prognosis for the child.... It is only through a clear view of the developmental process that future hope for a genuine prevention can be derived."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS OF STUDY, SHORTCOMINGS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS7.1 CONCLUSIONS7.1.1 The inadequacy of the lineal causal paradigm

Several reviews of the literature (Herzog and Sudia, Levitin, 1979; Biller, 1982; Blechman, 1982) have pointed out the inadequacy of the simplistic linear casual research paradigm for a valid understanding of the child's adaptation to divorce. These reviews have sought to conceptualize divorce as a process rather than an event with the focus on dynamic interactions and integrations rather than on static trends.

7.1.2 The lack of theoretical underpinnings in empirical studies

The lack of theoretical underpinnings in many of the current empirical studies in the divorce/father absence field prompted our attempt to integrate these findings into a relevant interpretative framework.

7.1.3 The appropriateness of Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development as a theoretical framework

Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development, conceptualized as "the progressive mutual accommodation between an active growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings

in which the developing person lives, as the process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded" (Bronfenbrenner, 1971:21) has provided an eminently suitable integrative and interpretative framework for divorce and father absence studies. It embraces not only the interaction between the child who is developing and his immediate environment which is constantly changing, but also the dialectical interactions between the various dimensions of the child's milieu, from the ontogenic, through the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems.

#### 7.1.4 The insight afforded by the cybernetic dynamic within Bronfenbrenner's framework

The cybernetic properties of this framework have enabled a view of the dialectical dynamics of the divorce process between the child's phenomenological experiences relevant to his socio-cognitive receptivity or stage, "structural readiness, (Kagan in Walker and Roberts, 1983) and his socialization and cognitive developmental learning in the family system. The quality of the mother's parenting, however, is in turn, related to the mother's coping with the stress of divorce, which is inextricably connected with her social supportive networks and with her financial circumstances which, in turn, are interdependent with community, economic, legal and cultural dimensions.

#### 7.1.5 The mesosystem as a possible key to understanding the child's adjustment to the divorce process

Indeed, it is the mesosystem, the interaction between the various dimensions which would seem to provide the key to an understanding of the child's adjustment to the divorce process. Garmezy's conditional or immunity - versus - vulnerability model of stress seems to be most relevant and appropriate to an examination of findings, since most researchers such as Wallerstein and Hetherington have pointed out the relationship between the unique individual child and his unique set of circumstances in the adjustment and coping process.

#### 7.1.6 The importance of longitudinal studies

Furthermore, it appears that longitudinal studies are essential for any valid understanding of the child's adjustment to divorce, for although some knowledge of initial reaction of the child to the divorce, e.g. the pre-school child's intense but short-lived reactions may be useful for immediate crisis intervention, no insight into the child's long-term adjustment and developmental coping may be derived from such observations. Thus, for instance, Wallerstein and Kelly's initial finding that the adolescent coped better immediately after divorce than the pre-school child, was reversed in the ten-year follow-up, where the child who had experienced divorce at the pre-school stage seemed to have emerged with a more positive attitude to marriage and life than the child who had experienced divorce at adolescence.

7.1.7 The importance of a multi-method, multi-perspectival approach

The studies of Hetherington, Guibaldi and Perry, and Huntington have shown that no valid explanation for observational trends can be made unless multi-method, multi-perspectival investigations are undertaken which explore the various dimensions and interactions between the dimensions.

7.1.8 The importance of the perspective of positive adaptation process

Ultimately, it is important to bear in mind that the other side of the coin of vulnerability and risk is coping and successful adjustment. In view of the fact that the single-parent family is no longer deviant in modern society, it is vital for us to gain some understanding of optimal adaptation processes. Thus, Kaslow's model of family adaptational evolvment within the divorce process and Wallerstein's conceptualization of the tasks, the mastery of which are necessary for the child's successful coping with parental divorce, provide process equivalents to the stages of mourning which Kübler Ross considered to be an integral part of working through bereavement.

7.1.9 The interaction of adaptation processes at various levels as the focus for theory, research methodology and intervention

The realization that the respective adaptation processes of child and family are interdependent with each other and with other changes in the various dimensions of the child's milieu, as shown in Garmezy's model of adaptation to stress, reinforce the appropriateness of Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development as the model for the purposes of integrating research methodology, findings and subsequent intervention processes; for it is the task of the educational psychologist to support and to facilitate not only coping and adjustment but growth.

7.1.10 The divorce process offering the potential for personal and family growth

Indeed, it is conceivable according to the principles of dysynchrony of morphogenesis and of plasticity that the child and his family rather than being stigmatized and impoverished both materially and spiritually, should be enabled to evolve within the divorce process to a state of new resilience, complexity and enrichment.

7.2 SHORTCOMINGS OF THIS STUDY

7.2.1 Condensed and lacking in sufficient breadth and depth of coverage

This assignment, completed in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the M.Ed. (Internship) degree, has perforce been subject to restrictions both as regards the time allowed for its completion and with regard to its length. Therefore the study is lacking in sufficient breadth and depth of coverage.

7.2.2 No focus on divorce in South Africa

Furthermore, the dearth of studies in this field in South Africa has forced us to concentrate on studies of the middle class population in the United States, a population not unlike the same group in South Africa, but from which it would be unwise to suggest any but the most general analogies.

7.3 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

7.3.1 Focus on South African population

There is an urgent need in South Africa for relevant investigation and empirical research in order to promote insight and understanding so that divorce intervention may be pursued as effectively as possible.

### 7.3.2 Replication of major studies avoiding prevalent research errors

Replication of some of the important American and English studies would be most useful, particularly if future studies in South Africa, taking up hypotheses generated, for instance, in the work of Wallerstein and Kelly, are punctilious about control measures and use statistically significant numbers of subjects. They should attempt, in general, to avoid some of the glaring errors prevailing in the divorce and father-absence field of research.

### 7.3.3 Utilization of dialectical and ecological developmental framework for theory, empirical studies and intervention

The utilization of a dialectical, systems and human ecological approach rather than a lineal causal research paradigm is most urgent.

### 7.3.4 Utilization of a multi-method, multi-perspectival research paradigm

Multi-perspectival, multi-method research programs are most necessary.

### 7.3.5 Utilization of a longitudinal study approach

Longitudinal studies are essential in order for the psychologist to gain a deeper understanding of the various forces at play during children's developmental adaptation so that effective intervention programs may be implemented.

### 7.3.6 Focus on differences within groups

In future research projects it will be most important to begin to focus on differences between groups i.e. family processes, rather than on differences between groups and general demographic studies. Though the latter emphases are important, we are more

likely to gain some understanding of individual functioning by utilizing the former approach within a multi-method paradigm offering a range of focuses which enhance and complement one another.

### 7.3.7 Marriage of research efforts and state/community/educational institutional support

It is suggested, because of the importance and complexity of divorce in the South African ecology of human development, that the imagination and the originality of research efforts in this field be married to the resources, support and the direction, offered by the State and by community and educational and research institutions.

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