

Is 'Single-Parent Family' a Misnomer Misdirecting Research and Policies?

Martha Hill* and Paul Callister**

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*Institute for Social Research
University of Michigan
Tel.: 734-763-2358
Fax: 734-615-3557
email: hillm@umich.edu

**Callister & Associates
Paekakariki, New Zealand

NOTE

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ABSTRACT

Terms such as 'single-parent family' can give false impressions, leading social scientists and policy makers to compose scores out of tune with children's family life. This paper focuses on children separated from one biological, but potentially involved, parent no longer coupled with their other biological parent and how unrecognized across-household ties obscure the view of family life. The paper offers ways to enhance recognizing the across-household complexities of 'family' in language and in research. It explores a blending of children's perspective with parents' perspectives and the addition of social relational ties to biological ties as a way of classifying family types. In all of this it attempts to bring an expanded vocabulary of 'family' to bear on the issues. New more accurate terms, such as 'near' and 'far' parent, 'separated' child, 'two-household' child, and 'mother-child-father triad' are explored as a means of moving research and policy-making to a better fit with the complex realities of 21st century families.

Key Words: single-parent family, non-resident parent, non-resident child, non-custodial parent, children's living arrangements, survey design, family policies.

America, like much of the world community, enters the 21st century having recently undergone dramatic transformation in the lived realities of what constitutes ‘family’ (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991). Yet research, policies and, in particular, language tend to cling to 20th century ideas of the single-household nuclear family as the model around which all revolve. Oversimplification of the vision of family can lead research, policies, and language to compose scores out of tune with children, parents and family life.

Family types commonly known as single-parent family, mother-only family, lone-mother family, sole-father family, and ‘fatherless’ family are focal points in policy discussions, political debates, and social science research, as well as everyday conversation. Underlying these terms and the images they convey is the assumption, explicitly recognized or not, that children in such families have but one parent, possibly at most one reliable parent. Typically, however, children in one-parent households have, not just one, but two living biological parents. A possibility that is not adequately envisioned is the “missing” parent as a potentially active, and positive, part of the children’s family life.¹

In an exploration of ways to reorient language, and in the process research and potentially policies, to 21st century realities, this paper focuses on parents’ and their biological children’s perspectives once a single-household nuclear family has either dissolved or failed to form when children were born. These are situations where ties are “invisible” because coresidence and bonds of a conjugal nature no longer hold. Many of the principles explored could apply as well to other complexities in family arrangements-- most especially ties between elderly parents and their adult children (see, e.g., (Anderson, et al., 1999). This suggests that it is broad-sweeping reorientation that is needed.

Some problems and issues go virtually unseen because across-household ties are inadequately recognized. It is not widely acknowledged, for example, that the U.S. Census, like censuses in many industrialized countries, may be undercounting some children (those visiting their non-custodial/non-resident parent on census day, so away from their usual home), overcounting other children (those who evenly split their time between parents with joint physical custody), and providing no indication of adults with the status of ‘non-custodial/non-resident’ parent (Callister and Hill, 2002). For reasons that will become more apparent later, this paper

¹ Yet, at the same time it is clear that some non-custodial parents pose a danger to their children through domestic violence, drug use, or mental illness. This does create major complexity in developing family law that both supports shared parenting and is in the best interests of the child.

will refer, in some contexts, to a person with this status as a ‘separated’ parent, but in other contexts a ‘far’ parent, with the custodial/resident parent designated as a ‘near’ parent.

Being counted properly, and in the correct location, is clearly important, these being the primary objectives of the U.S. Census. Failing to identify far parents can also be important. Not only does not counting nonresident parents devalue these individuals as parents, but further problems arise if these data, or surveys modeled on them, are then used to study issues such as income adequacy and distribution, housing size and adequacy, job mobility, and childcare. Without information on relationships across households it is easy to make assumptions that may not hold. It is easy, for example, to assume that adults living on their own, or even adults living in couple households, can easily move to other locations for job opportunities. This may not be the case, however. For many far parents a move for job-related reasons can mean a loss of regular contact with their separated children (Stewart, 1999), discouraging involved far parents from moving to better job prospects. Equally, a near-parent household may be constrained, sometimes under court order, not to move too far from the far parent. In addition, the separated parent living nearby may provide a source of childcare; some separated children may have a far parent willing and able to care for them after school or at other times.

Failing to recognize across-household ties may also limit the vision of policy-makers. Currently U.S. policy makers and researchers are focused on marriage as a policy prescription for addressing a number of social and economic challenges, including child poverty (see, for example, Mincy, 2002, Thomas and Sawhill, 2002, and Garfinkel, Glei & McLanahan, 2000). There may, however, be circumstances where strengthening separated children’s interaction with a far parent provides a better alternative than introducing additional parenting figures through (re)marriage. Possibilities of involved far parents working effectively for their separated children’s good have attracted relatively little attention. Just prior to the recent switch to marriage as a policy prescription, U.S. policy-makers were on a path that acknowledged the importance of at least one aspect of far parents’ parenting role – provision of financial support – and were starting to develop policies to enhance far parents’ earnings as a means of increasing child support payments (Blank and Ellwood, 2002). Should these policy coals be rekindled to put in place policies for strengthening far parents’ earning power, possibly building on them in ways that encourage additional parenting roles of far parents? Are there lessons to be learned from family life that views far parents along with their separated children and near parents? Are there aspects of these configurations of family that should be encouraged?

Although research and policies have been paying increasing attention to formerly invisible separated parents (Coley, 2001; Marsiglio, Amato, and Day, 2000; Garfinkel, McLanahan, and Hanson, 1998; Seltzer, 1991; Stewart, 1999), data about them are scarce and almost exclusively drawn from the potentially biased reports of near parents (Garfinkel, McLanahan, and Hanson, 1998; Schaeffer, Seltzer, and Dykema, 1998). This paper describes the contributions of existing data and illustrates ways to point research and data collection in directions that better assess the quality of family environments that extend across households. Far parents, as well as near parents or separated children, willing to identify them as such-- and researchers and policy-makers willing to consider the possibilities --are all keys in revealing this. Terms and associated constructs used in conceptualizing and discussing important aspects of families are central to this process.

The paper envisions a shift in discussions to a higher plane where co-residence is recognized as but one among a multiplicity of dimensions of interactions across a network of family members. This paper draws attention to language and, in the process, to research, and, at times, to policies and the way they can go hand-in-hand. It explores coordinated ways of shifting to more comprehensive models of 'family,' detailing terms and associated constructs to help accomplish this and illustrating ways the enhanced language of families would work together with research to better inform policy-makers, with changes in policies potentially assisting the research as well.

Language and associated constructs around 'family' and 'household' along with the language of questions in surveys is of central focus. Along the lines of recommendations in recent literature on the family (Cherlin and Griffith, 1998), social network analysis (e.g., Wasserman and Faust, 1994) is drawn on as a source of language and concepts and, in fitting with Bould (1993), a variety of terms and constructs are suggested rather than striving for a singular, universal image of 'family.' The U.S. takes center stage in this exploration, with some additional insights drawn from other countries.

The paper begins by noting the extent to which far parents are potentially important actors in their children's lives and how current ways of discussing and observing family life obscure viewing their role. This is followed by an illustrative review of existing American quantitative data collection efforts and what they tell us about connections between far parents and their separated children. Ways to enhance recognizing the across-household complexity of family life in language and in research are then addressed. Attention is drawn to the language of questions

asked in surveys and concepts underlying research and policies. While the primary focus is on large-scale data collection, the issues raised are relevant for designing any quantitative study of family life.

SEPARATED PARENTS

Until relatively recent in our history, disease, war, accidents, starvation, abandonment and death during childbirth meant that many children grew up without a mother, a father or without either parent. Uhlenberg (1980) notes that in the United States, even as recently as in 1900, 1 out of 4 white children under the age of fifteen had lost a parent, and 1 out of 62 had lost both parents. The corresponding figures for 1976 were 1 out of 20 and 1 out of 1800. Ellwood and Jencks (2002) estimate that in 1910 17% of children under 16 years of age had a parent who had died, but by the 1990s this had declined to 5%.

At the start of the 21st century, while death and abandonment remain routes to this household type, and new routes have emerged,² the most common ways of getting there are through the dissolution of a union by divorce or separation or by a union failing to form when a child is born. Typically, the mother assumes custody if a union fails to form, and when a union dissolves children are allocated one primary caregiver, either through a decision by the parents or through a court order. In any case, the child does still have two biological parents, unlike the historical model in which death claimed one or more of them.

The child's family picture may, in fact, be even more complex. One or both of the biological parents may subsequently re-partner thus creating stepparent relationships. In part it has been the proliferation of these new family types that has promoted the shift by many social scientists from a biological construction of parenthood to a social construction. Yet in relation to fathers, both social and biological science provides some evidence that biology still matters. The law also places particular responsibilities on biological fathers who have separated from the biological mother. Quantitative research undertaken in the United States indicates that, on average, in coupled (married or not) families biological (and adoptive) fathers invest more heavily in children than do stepfathers, and biological fathers contribute time and attention to their children even when they are nonresident (Harris, Heard and King, 2002; Hofferth and Anderson,

² Changes in technology, social norms, labor market participation, and availability of public assistance have provided alternative ways of creating and supporting one-adult households, including those raising children. For instance, now women can choose to have children on their own, including using the services of anonymous sperm donors (Hertz, 2002). In many of these situations (e.g., with sperm donors) there are no expectations of contact with the absent biological parent and no legal responsibilities for that parent.

2003). Qualitative research carried out in New Zealand shows that children often retain strong bonds to "blood" links, even in cases where the parents hardly communicate at all (Fleming and Atkinson, 1999). In addition, there is some evidence that many children separated from their biological parents (adopted children and those whose fathers were anonymous sperm donors being prime examples) still want to establish some contact with the missing biological parent, if only to view the source of their own genetic makeup (Hertz, 2002). These types of research suggest that understanding connections of children to biological parents, even if these parents are not living full-time with the children, could be important. Research on primates also indicates that biological fathers may be genetically programmed to care for their own children and serve a protective role (Alberts, 2003).

Reflecting that biology is still considered by many to matter, in general, there is a societal expectation (codified in child support laws) that a separated parent has an on-going financial obligation to support his/her children also, although at times more contested, an expectation of on-going contact with the children (Sarre, 1996). This can mean two active biological parents for children. At the same time it means parents residing in two separate households, and children potentially spending time in two separate homes.

Children with a far parent have become a solid feature of everyday life. As many as half of U.S. children are expected to spend part of their childhood living apart from at least one of their parents, usually their fathers (Zill, 1996; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). To further complicate matters, a non-trivial portion of the parents missing from these children's households are in households that contain other children. It has been estimated that around half of fathers in the United States who do not live with their biological children have family ties to another set of children, 24 percent having three or more groups of children in their lives (Smock, Manning and Stewart, 2001). This, no doubt, presents challenges for juggling parenting responsibilities, and it clearly presents problems for researchers matching parents with their separated children.

Although some notable fraction of far parents do not appear to be engaged in active parenting of their separated children, a sizable number do. Joint custody arrangements are one way of identifying those likely to be at the high end of active parenting (although having custody does not necessarily guarantee active and positive parenting, just as such parenting is not guaranteed by life in two-biological parent homes). While sole custody, usually by the mother, continues to be the most common arrangement in the U.S.-- almost 70 percent of households containing separated children were sole-custody, mother-custodian in the late 1990s (Child

Trends, 2002) --joint custody (physical if not legal) has become increasingly common, especially in states that encourage its application.³ Joint physical custody, in which the child spends roughly 25 percent or more of his or her time at each parent's home, was the arrangement in over 20 percent of post-divorce U.S. families in the late 1990s.

The shift toward joint custody has not been uniform across the economic spectrum, however. Children in households well above poverty levels are more likely to be living in a joint custody arrangement (Child Trends, 2002). As of 1998 only about half of the high-income children were in a mother-only custody arrangement, compared to almost 80 percent of poor children. Physical custody by the father, overall an arrangement in about 10 percent of the households of separated children, was considerably more likely among high-income children than among poor children.

Child custody, is only part of the picture; a far parent can have contact with his/her separated children without sharing their custody. Indications are that the majority of far parents in the U.S. are in contact with their separated children, some with frequent contact and some with their children living with them for a month or more during the year. Estimates of the degree of contact between a far parent and his/her separated children vary widely, however, depending on who is reporting the contact; more contact appears in far parents' reports than proxy reports by near parents (Coley and Morris, 2002; Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994).

Based on far parents' own reports of contact in the late 1980s, 80 percent of children with a separated father had contact with him; the comparable figure for children with a separated mother was 83 percent (Stewart, 1999). Based on the near parent's instead (for the 1990s when expectations would be for more contact) corresponding estimates were 60 percent for children with a separated father and 78 percent for children with a separated mother (Child Trends, 2002). From both reporters there are indications of the degree of contact being non-trivial. From far parents' reports, about one-third of children with a far father saw him at least once a week and almost 15 percent spent a month or more living with him. From near parents' reports, the average number of days of contact with a separated father, for those staying in contact, was 69 days. Patterns were similar but with a somewhat higher degree of contact for a far mother.

³ The shift toward joint custody is attributable to concepts of custody based on the "best interests" of the child, as well as changes in the gender division of childcare, household work, and labor market work, both for men and women, pushing law makers and family courts towards gender neutrality and shared parenting when assigning custody. While there are strong views for and against joint custody, a meta-analysis of research on child adjustment in joint custody versus sole custody arrangements provides support for the joint custody model (Bauserman, 2002).

Contact, like custody, varies across the economic spectrum. Relying on the near parent's report, indications are that contact with the far parent is more likely among higher income children than among poor children (Child Trends, 2002). Even for low-income children though--at least those who are infants with a far father --there appears widespread desire on the part of the separated father for contact with the child even if it is not taking place. Remember to put dates in (e.g., Carlson, McLanahan, and Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Lin and McLanahan, 2001; Teitler, 2001; Padilla and Reichman, 2001). Indications are that near mothers are less in favor of interaction between the far father and the separated child, however, and they may, indeed, at times, serve as 'gatekeepers.'

Having contact does not necessarily mean being an involved parent but indications are that a notable portion of far parents are involved parents. Research suggests that among separated children from dissolved marital unions roughly half of those in contact with their father are actively engaged with him on a steady basis (Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994). Indications are that even fathers separated at the time of birth of the child are not 'absent' at the very early in the child's life (Carlson, McLanahan, and Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Teitler, 2001; Padilla and Reichman, 2001). Indications are, as well, that roughly one-third of the far fathers reported to have had contact with their separated children in the last year were involved in the children's school activities, 10 percent with a high level of involvement (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

While a meta-analysis of research regarding child support payments, frequency of visitation, and closeness of relationship-- much of it based on near parents' reports --paints a mixed picture of the contributions of far fathers' involvement to their separated children's well-being, positive contributions have been identified (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999). These include payment of child support and authoritative parenting but not contact or feelings of closeness. Research regarding involvement in school activities in grades K-12 is further illustration of the existence of positive parenting. Children in contact with their far fathers were found to get higher grades, enjoy school more, and be more likely to participate in extracurricular activities if their far father was involved in their school than if he was not (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

The picture of far parents as parents, however, is far from complete. As discussed more fully later in the paper, research has only begun to touch on the wide variety of different kinds of parenting involvement possible (e.g., Coley, 2001) and only begun to address important

measurement issues such as obtaining information from the far parents themselves (Sorensen, 1997; Schaeffer, Seltzer, and Dykema, 1998). Much is yet to be learned about the parenting behavior of far parents and what their parenting behavior means for separated children, for near parents, and for the far parents themselves.

TIES THAT BIND

Addressing issues concerning the parenting behavior of separated parents requires re-examination of the language and images of family that researchers, policy-makers, and the general population carry with them. An important part of this re-examination is awareness of the disconnect between definitions of family and of the collective unit from which families are usually observed – the household.

Definitions

Household-- the collection of individuals in a dwelling unit --is what most statistical agencies focus on in their gathering of information. With a dwelling unit as the visible skin of a household, and dwelling units unlikely to move as one counts them, problems of omission or double-counting seem less problematic when using the household as the unit of observation rather than trying to count a population of people constantly in motion. Hence, censuses have gathered information about individuals living in households, and this practice has received international support. For example, in its *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, the United Nations (1998) states that a family cannot comprise more than one household. Surveys of family life, both large and small scale, have tended to follow that pattern, with a sampling of households to gather information about the individuals living there.

Defining ‘family’ is more problematic than defining ‘household,’ and this is one reason statistical agencies and researchers have tended to focus on households. While policies and researchers often assume that family and household are the same, they can be very different. This difference is particularly important when considering research on fathers (Cherlin and Griffith, 1998). Whereas a household is composed of individuals sharing the same dwelling, family is conceptualized as a collection of related individuals, though ties that bind a family together can come in a wide variety of forms. ‘Family’ has often been thought of as a biological unit in which kinship is important. Kinship ties, forged by blood, marriage, or adoption, are not spatially constrained, so kin can be spread across various households, or even countries. The fact that kin

structures, and the allocation of kin across households, are subject to change over time adds further complication.

Although kinship is often the glue that binds a family together, it may not be the only medium. ‘Family’ is increasingly becoming a social construction. The wide variety of definitions of family this creates is well illustrated in qualitative studies of children’s perceptions of family (e.g., Pryor and Rodgers, 2001; Smart, Neale and Wade, 2001) showing that ties of affection can sometimes supercede biological or legal ties when defining family.

Financial transfers and support (including emotional support) for other members of a group are also seen as an important aspect of defining families. However, there is the potential for people to be living together as a family but with no explicit financial or emotional transfers, or for family members to be living apart but engaged in a high level of such transfers.

A key part of couple definition is some notion of a “time” commitment. In a discussion about married couples, England and Farkas (1986) explicitly raise the question of “time,” arguing that the formation of such families involves an expectation of a long-term contract, even if there is the possibility that the couple will separate. Within this, they suggest that families are units in which ongoing bargaining takes place about several aspects of life. Bargaining, though, may not be successful, and couples may dissolve a relationship through separation or divorce and start new relationships, thus creating the need for new definitions and new descriptions of families. Concepts such as ‘blended’ families, ‘non-custodial/non-resident’ parenting, stepmothers and stepfathers and even step-grandparents all become part of wider family definitions.

‘Family’ has also often been defined as a legal institution, and in some countries there is still much focus on legal marriage. Research in the United States, in particular, tends to focus on legally married couples. One result is that in much of the U.S. literature unwed mothers cohabiting with the father of the child are often classified as sole parents. This is in contrast to the Nordic countries and New Zealand where de facto relationships are seen as a key group within couple relationships.

Who is recognized as a family member can also vary across the life course and by gender. Studies of U.S. children’s concepts of family show that very young children rely heavily on co-residency ties in defining family and that girls expand their criteria for family to include relational ties beyond the household earlier than boys do (Borduin *et al.*, 1990). Similar gender differences appear among U.S. adults, with women tending to have larger families than men because they take into account an added layer of relations – those close to the people close to them rather than

just the people close to them (Levin, 1993; Trost, 1993).

Taken together, the literature suggests (1) that contemporary family relationships are negotiated over time rather than fixed by duty, law, or the positional status of family members, (2) that families transform themselves in relation to major structural changes in the society, (3) that fixed definitions based on blood, legal, or co-residence ties are inadequate in addressing the diversity and change that now characterize families, and (4) that kin networks are to be understood as individualized, flexible, and based on ties of affection as well as ties of blood and law. With all of these factors to take into account, the current system for classifying families and their members leaves statistical agencies, research organizations, and policy-makers struggling to make sense of the diversity and complexity of family life in the 21st century. Problems are heightened by a lack of information about connections between people living in separate households.

Fitting Language

Problems are also heightened by the language commonly used. When family types are evolving rapidly, as in recent decades, language to accurately describe them may not keep pace. Yet rapid growth in the diversity and complexity of family types and parenting arrangements make it especially important to describe families in accurate terms. The shorthand that has developed for use in research and policy debates, especially loosely employed by the popular media, works against acknowledging such complexity. It is much easier, for example, to describe children as simply being raised by ‘sole mothers’ or in ‘single parent families’ than to talk about the real complexity in parenting arrangements and children’s lives. Terms such as ‘father who no longer lives with the mother of his children’ are appearing in our written literature, though they are cumbersome to verbalize. Terms such as ‘absent father,’ while potentially an incorrect description of connections with their children, are easier to use. Similarly, ‘fatherless family’ is a term that has been used by some groups when promoting the idea of shifting back to living in traditional families (e.g. Blankenhorn, 1996). With a more sympathetic view towards differing family arrangements, Duncan and Edwards (1997: 30) use the term ‘lone mothers’ for “all mothers bringing up children without a resident partner.”

Even writing this paper presented difficulties for the authors in terms of whether to, effectively, coin the term ‘far parent’ or stick with the more typical terms ‘non-custodial’ parent or ‘non-resident’ parent. The literature is mixed in its use of the terms ‘non-resident’ and ‘non-

custodial,’ typically giving no clear justification for the use of one term over the other. ‘Non-custodial’ is not an ideal term. It is a legal term and reflects a legally sanctioned unequal division of custody which some argue discriminates against fathers (Braver and Griffin, 2000).⁴ There are also parents who truly share custody and the care of their children for whom ‘non-custodial’ is an inaccurate term. (Parallel problems apply to terms such as ‘primary caregiver.’) The term ‘non-resident’ has problems as well, in that it implies the "family" is where the child lives most of the time and the other parent is not a "resident" of that family. When that child is with the non-resident parent the parent is the resident parent. Furthermore, ‘non-’ prefixing both terms is negative in nature and suggestive of deviance. While some parents who have been separated from their children may well engage in activities potentially destructive to their children or former partners, a sizable portion can, and do, engage in constructive parenting and cooperative sharing of parenting responsibilities. These various terms have sufficient problems to prompt us to look for something different.

‘Separated’ parent is a newer term with the appeal that it is more neutral in terms of its implications regarding primary or secondary parent status and more readily lends itself to complementary terms for parent and child. ‘Separated’ child is a fitting term for the child no matter which of the parent’s homes he/she is residing in at the time. However, when ‘separated’ is applied to ‘parents’ the term poses the problem that the parents may never have been married or cohabited, or if they had been married that they are not yet divorced.

We decided to step back and look at the biological family, attempting, in accordance with the National Center on Fathers and Families (n.d.) recommendation, to add the separated child’s perspective to the typical approach of taking exclusively the parents’ perspective. From the child’s viewpoint the terms ‘near’ parent (usually called custodial or residential) and ‘far’ parent (usually called non-custodial or non-residential) seemed to fit well. The terms are complementary with relatively weak implications regarding primary and secondary parent status.

What we are suggesting with the terminology is a somewhat radical approach-- instead of one adult, or even two adults, being the center around which the statistical family is built, bring children into the center as well. Such an approach would be supported by also making the child, rather than the family, the center of family policy. In some industrialized countries, such as New Zealand and Sweden, family policy is increasingly being influenced by a need to comply with the

⁴ In a survey, which included a question about possible favoritism within the Arizona legal system in relation to divorce, Braver and Griffin noted that 25 percent of mothers thought the system was slanted towards mothers (two thirds took a neutral position). Significantly more men, 74 percent, thought it favored mothers.

1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC). This convention endeavors to support giving children a greater “voice” in policy making. However, based on concepts of “best interests” of the child, the convention also supports the concept of shared parental responsibility. In particular article 18.1 states:

States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern (United Nations, 2002).

Currently, the articles of UNCROC enter less into considerations in the U.S. since it is yet to ratify that UN convention.⁵

As Nolan (2001) notes, there would important issues to consider, including whether this would be a biological or a social construct and how to manage overlap between families (siblings being part of different families). In addition, while young children would be the center of the family connections it would generally be the parent determining these relationships. This child-centered approach, however, does offer possibilities of expanding the horizons of family researchers, facilitating both new perspectives and the use of methodologies such as social network tools not currently widely used. The terms we develop in this section and add to later in the paper are an attempt to move to a more child-centered approach. Struggle with terms shows language lagging in its ability to effectively represent realities. This lag can pose barriers to aligning research and policies with the newer family types.

Language is important to the way researchers and policy makers perceive the world and how it fits together. It is a tool that shapes, and is shaped by, the ideas and policies that are developed, the problems that are recognized, and the solutions that are considered. If ‘single-parent family’ connotes but one parent available to a child, then the circumstances and possible contributions of a second, though separated, parent do not come readily to mind. ‘Binuclear family’ (Ahrons and Perlmutter, 1982), or ‘separated family’ more readily convey these possibilities. These are terms suggested for use, or beginning to be used, in other countries as well (e.g., see Birks, 2000, 2001a&b, for early use of some of these latter terms in New Zealand).

Similarly, if researchers, policy-makers, and the general public refer to far fathers as ‘deadbeat dads’⁶ (Reichert, 1999; Sorensen, 1997) because they are not paying child support they

⁵ While the United States signed the convention in 1995 and Somalia signed in 2002, these are the only countries not to have ratified the convention. Those governments who have ratified the convention are required to report every five years on progress in implementing its articles.

⁶ Sometimes the term “deadbroke” is also used in relation to low-income non-custodial fathers (Talvi, 2002).

are likely to focus only on enforcement of child support awards rather than expanding the vision to include ways to bolster earning power or recognize potential contributions from social involvement with their separated children. Indeed, the far fathers themselves may be less willing to participate in their separated children's lives and less willing to let others know they are far fathers when such terms are a part of common language.

Examples of incorrect language abound, to be found even in prominent official publications that support the idea of collecting data on far parents. In the U.S. a report of a national workshop for improving data on marriage, divorce and cohabitation (Data Collection Committee of the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2001) places high priority on expanding surveys to include information on all parents and guardians, stressing the point that "we [the U.S.] won't have an accurate picture of parent-child interactions and what parents do that is good for children until we know what nonresident parents do." Despite this recognition of the importance of far parents and the report's clear sensitivity to family structure issues, its executive summary slips in stating that the proportion of children living in 'single-parent families' rose in recent years due to nonmarital childbearing and divorce. More accurately the living arrangement is 'single-parent family segments' (or in most situations they will be a 'single-parent household') and many of the children in that arrangement are part of two parent (or "separated") families.

To illustrate how incorrect use of language can contribute to over-simplified ideas for policy prescriptions, consider a stated goal of the 1996 U.S. Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) -- to "encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families." This has led to a push to promote marriage as a solution to the poverty of children in homes receiving public support. Yet many of those children are already in 'two-parent families,' two-parent families but not two-parent homes. Glossing over this distinction ignores the complications that arise when marriage brings a third parent into a child's life, an event associated with reduced child support payments from the far parent (Hill, 1992) and with some negative long run outcomes for children (Hill, Yeung, & Duncan, 2001). In some cases children may benefit more from improved economic opportunities for their existing parents than from gaining a larger collection of parents. Better recognition of this complication argues for a policy agenda assisting far parents, not just promoting marriage.⁷

⁷ Marriage as a policy prescription for child poverty would not be given serious consideration in countries such as New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden because cohabitation between heterosexual couples there has long been recognized as the equivalent of marriage.

Across-Household Families: ‘Single-Parent Family’ Revisited

The complexities of families spanning household boundaries and the misconceptions this can create are illustrated by comparing what is typically available in census or survey data – not only in the US but in many other countries as well -- with the more complicated picture that becomes apparent once across-household linkages are known. Figure 1 shows examples of the standard kind of data collected for families in a variety of household settings. From such data social scientists generally obtain and publish two counts, that of (a) single-parent families and (b) single-parent households. Take the three households along the left side of Figure 1 (Households A, B, and C). These three illustrated households can be interpreted as yielding four single-parent families (one a subfamily in the same household with another single-parent family). This is the classification often reported in official statistics in the U.S. and other countries, including Canada, Norway, and New Zealand. Equally, the data can be interpreted as yielding one single-parent household (Household A), one extended family household (Household B), and one two-family household (Household C). With our existing paradigm, a researcher trying to describe the real complexity in family forms might report one single-parent family household, two single-parent families within one household, and one single-parent family in an extended household.

FIGURE 1 HERE.

This type of data offers no information on possible links across households. Therefore, to be strictly correct each of the single-parent families should be described as a ‘single parent family segment within a household,’ or, for ease, ‘single-parent family segment.’ However the term is commonly shortened in research, policy-making, and everyday language to ‘single-parent family.’ This shortening is potentially misleading in policy debates.

If surveys could identify family linkages across households it would be possible to gauge how complete each ‘single parent family’ is. Figure 1 illustrates across-household biological ties. Each left-hand side household contains a biological parent of the target child in the adjoining left-hand side household (i.e., Household AA contains the biological father of the target child in Household A). Recognizing these ties, it is apparent that two of the target children in Households A, B, and C have a far parent actively involved in their care (the target child in Household A, with far parent in Household AA; and the target child in Household C, with far parent in Household

CC). These are situations where the child has two biological parents residing in separate households but where the child has a high level of contact with the far parent. Each of these target children in these situations is more accurately termed a ‘two-household child.’ With the additional information on cross household links available, it is apparent that there is but one “true” ‘single-parent family’—the one-household target child situation.

The examples in Figure 1 are relatively straightforward in terms of whether separated parents are “active” parents. In reality, though, there is a continuum to the level, and wide variety in the nature, of parenting that far parents (like their near parent counterparts) could offer their children. Hence, defining “active” or “involved” parents is not as straightforward as this illustration suggests.

Ties Re-envisioned

The wide variety of ways far parents (again, like their near parent counterparts) could be involved, or tied, to their children’s lives merits considerable further investigation. In a review article on “(In)visible men”, Coley (2001) argues that much of the currently available U.S. survey information on non-residential fathers focuses on very basic constructs of father involvement. She note that “[a]lthough residence, visitation, and financial support are seemingly objective and easily measured indexes of paternal involvement they represent an incomplete and simplistic view of parenting” (p. 745). Coley argues that most measures “do not tap into fathers’ emotional involvement with their children, the level of responsibility they take, the types of activities they do with their children, or their conceptualizations of fatherhood or paternal commitment” (p. 746). Coley also suggests that significant amounts of paternal support, both cash and in-kind, may go unreported in formal systems. Two reasons she puts forward for this discrepancy may be parent’s unwillingness to divulge sensitive information to the government and the methods used in gathering such data. Overall, Coley warns against using only one source of data when measuring the involvement of a separated parent, arguing the case for multiple reporters.

Measures of active parenting, even within intact two parent families, are complex. For example, Lamb (1987) breaks childcare work into three categories. These are: engagement (or interaction), accessibility, and responsibility. Lamb notes that responsibility is very hard to measure. Time use research has shown that a parent can claim to be undertaking childcare while sleeping at night, or while the child is playing at a neighbors house because the parent is still ultimately responsible for the child (Schwartz, 2002). Contact by separated parents could be as

little as a card sent yearly for a birthday through to where the child spends an equal amount of time with both parents. These issues raise the question of what trigger point should be used to define whether a child with two living biological parents, either in one household or living in separate households, can be considered to have two active parents.

With much to be learned yet about the interaction of separated parents with their children, it is very difficult to know where to draw this line. Expanded exploration of the types and strength of ties that constitute father ‘involvement’ is in order, and, as discussed later, there is much merit to couching this exploration in terms of attention to the entire family network and the ‘connectivity’ (in the language of social network analysis) across its members.

STUDYING ACROSS-HOUSEHOLD FAMILIES WITH CURRENT SURVEYS

Before addressing ways of expanding visions of across-household family by operating on the juncture of language, research, and policy, we first provide a flavor for the kinds of views of separated parents and their children afforded by existing surveys.

Cross-Sectional Studies

While the CPS currently cannot be used to determine emotional connections between children and separated parents, CPS April Child Support Supplements (1994, 1996, and 1998) have gathered information on custody arrangements, contact with far parents, and support payments from non-custodial parents to the custodial parent (*Child Trends*, 2000; Lyon, 1999). This information is gathered via the custodial parent, and more specifically includes child support arrangements, amounts received, and changes in amount; responsibility for health insurance coverage; physical and legal custody; visitation privileges; residential location of non-resident parent; amount of contact the child had last year with the non-resident parent; provision of goods, including gifts, for children; child support payments made as well as received; and agreements made by the separated parents. In addition, in a 1980 supplement on marital and fertility histories separated fathers were asked whether they had children from a previous marriage and if so how many of these children lived elsewhere (Cherlin, Griffith and McCarthy, 1983).

Other examples of cross-sectional studies exploring aspects of separated father involvement include the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES), noted by Cherlin

and Griffith (1998). NHES 1996 included a parent involvement component that asked the parents/guardians of 16,910 kindergarteners through 12th graders questions, including 5,440 children who had a far father, about mothers' and fathers' involvement in their children's schools. The resident parent, usually the mother, provided the responses. <http://nces.ed.gov/nhes/>

National Panel Studies

A panel design to a survey can facilitate identification of separated parent, situations that occur during the course of the study period, and provide the potential for linking separated parent data. Household listings are updated each wave, and sample members followed to new households when they move out of existing ones. The Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) is an example of a national study that pioneered this approach and has a long study period. A number of other American surveys have followed in these footsteps.

The Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), ongoing for over 30 years and following offspring of sample members as they establish their own households, has collected information annually on child support payments received. The study has asked as well about financial support of anyone outside the household; however, the recipient of the financial support, in most years, is not identified, and could be an elderly parent, sibling, etc. rather than a separated child. The study has followed all adult sample members from the start; hence, members of couples living in the same household in 1968 have been tracked to separate households when they have split up. In the early years of the study, this facilitated matching of separated parents, father with mother, in their distinct households (Hill, 1992). However, over time initially coupled individuals have become increasingly unrepresentative of separated parents. With the advent of a change in following rules (to track sample children, not just sample adults) and recontact beginning in 1994 of households containing a sample child but not a sample adult, the study has since facilitated representative analysis of matched set of separated parents (Smock and Manning, 1997). The PSID also has facilitated analysis of the role family structure changes play in children's lives by tracing children from birth into adulthood, allowing examination of differential influences of divorce or separation at different stages in children's lives (Hill, Yeung, and Duncan, 2001).

The PSID, on occasion, has also had special supplements gathering extensive information relating to child development and interaction with parents. Two separate waves of the Child Development Supplement, CDS-I (1997) and CDS-II (2002/2003) have gathered extensive data relating to effects of family, school, and neighborhood on child development. CDS-I interviewed

about 2,400 families with children ages 0-12, and approximately 2,000 were reinterviewed by CDS-II. While CDS-I attempted interviews with far parents, because response rates were low, CDS-II did not. Both waves of CDS, though, include child time diaries (self-reported by the child if aged 9 or older) and at least a few questions regarding far parents. These data have been yielding interesting insights into household-based views of the role of parents in their children's lives (e.g., Yeung, et.al., 2001) with some insight into the role of far parents as well (Hofferth and Anderson, 2003).

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is an example of a large-scale official longitudinal survey with a rather short panel period. SIPP contains a topical module on support for non-household members that asks a number of questions about child support and gathers basic information on time spent with absent children (http://www.sipp.census.gov/sipp/top_mod/2001/quests/wave5/supnonhh.htm). An initial question asks "During the past 12 months, did you make payments for the support of your child or children under 21 years of age who live outside the household?" (with a separate question asking how many of the children receiving child support are under age 18, the age limit used by many surveys asking about non-custodial children). Details about payments are sought including amount, whether it is a voluntary or court ordered payment, and whether health insurance is included in the payments. A question is also asked about custodial arrangements. The time spent with separated children requires estimates to be made in days, weeks or months in the past year.

Canada also provides an example of an official longitudinal study of children that was commenced in the mid 1990s and goes some way into establishing complex cross-household relationships. The Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) includes questions about historical custody arrangements, the existence of other siblings outside the household, whether the biological parents were together when the child was born and whether the father's name is on the birth certificate (Statistics Canada, 1995). This type of survey, which is very long and complex, provides opportunities for interviewers to delve deeply into topics that would not be possible in a short self-completed survey. This initial questionnaire collected information on who the child lived with on a year by year basis, but no specific information was collected on contact and time spent with non-custodial parents. Interestingly, early reports from the survey suggest that one very basic type of connection between father and child – the father's name being on the birth certificate – has been on the rise (Marcil-Gratton, 1998).

There are examples of long-panel-length surveys in the U.S. being used to determine the

levels of contact separated parents have with their children by asking the far parent directly. The United States National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) 1979 has asked men questions about the living arrangements of their children and the level of contact they have with children who do not live with them (Lerman and Sorensen, 2000). It has also regularly asked questions about children living outside of the home. These include how often the fathers visit each child and the duration of these visits (*ibid*, p. 141). Similarly, the later NLSY97 has questions about contact with far parents and the receipt of child support payments. It also has indicators of whether paternity has been established for the target youth in the survey (Argys and Peters, 2001).

A nationally representative large-scale survey with separated parents in mind is the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). It specifically asks the question: “Do you have any biological or adopted children aged 18 or younger who do not live in the household at least half the time?” While noting the strength of the NSFH survey for identifying far fathers, Garfinkel *et al* (1998, p. 55) estimate that nearly 40 percent of such fathers are missing from the survey. They suggest that one third of these men are in jail or are so loosely attached to households that they are not interviewed, but they still attempt estimates of the characteristics of the “missing” fathers by such means as assuming a high level of homogeneity in assortative mating, using the characteristics of custodial mothers to reveal the characteristics of non-custodial fathers. This assumption of a high level of homogeneity in assortative mating was subsequently supported by Garfinkel, Glei and McLanahan (2002). However, this later study also suggests caution when assuming that fathers have similar characteristics to mothers. Fathers, for example, may be in prison whereas mothers are not, or the other way around.

Despite omission of select segments of separated fathers, much of the published literature on the amount of contact far parents in America have with their children comes from the NSFH survey (e.g. Seltzer, 1991; Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988; Stewart, 1999). The published U.S. literature, though, focuses almost exclusively on divorce and separation of married couples as the event creating separated parents. In the Stewart study both mothers and fathers who reported not living with their biological children were asked what month and year they last lived with each absent child and asked each child’s sex and age. A focal absent child was then randomly selected and further questions were asked about contact with that child. This process generated a sample of 156 far mothers and 531 far fathers. Despite the relatively large overall sample size of the NSFH, these comparatively small numbers illustrate the difficulty of obtaining a good sample of such parents through a purely random sample.

The data collected by the NSFH provides useful, but relatively crude, measures of contact with far parents. For example, Stewart found that just over a fifth of target children had not seen their fathers in the reference year, while at the other end of the spectrum a third saw them at least once a week (for some at this higher end, no doubt, these visits could have been motivated by the absent father wanting to visit the mother with whom he still has a “romantic attachment,” not just a desire to spend time with the child, as the McLanahan, Garfinkel and Mincy, 2001, *Fragile Families* research suggests). Additional measures of contact were the number of times children received phone calls or letters and the number of weeks a child lived or visited with their far parent each year. Omitted here is contact via the internet, which is potentially one way of children having contact with their non-resident parents without close control by the custodial parent. The use of cell phones, including the use of text messaging, also opens up new ways for contact which can bypass control by the custodial parent.

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a nationally representative study of more than 20,000 adolescents in grades 7 through 12 in the U.S. in 1995 with a follow-up interview one year later, also provides crude measures of the quantity and quality of paternal involvement for far parents in a context that takes care in distinguishing biological from step parents. Measures of parental involvement include a quantity assessment (in terms of the number of activities, from a list of five, that the parent and adolescent were engaged in during the last four weeks) and a quality assessment (level of closeness adolescent feels to parent). These simple measures drawn from questions about far fathers allowed Harris and Ryan (forthcoming) to sort out influences of biological ties versus family context in the degree of involvement of fathers. They found that far biological fathers’ involvement with their children varied little with whether a stepfather was resident with the mother of their children and was less than that of stepfathers, which in turn was less than that of biological resident fathers. They also found that only among children in two-biological-parent families [more correctly, two-biological-parent households] did the majority enjoy high levels of involvement from both parents. Harris and Ryan acknowledge, however, that the Add Health measures are limited and that richer, more detailed indicators of parental investment and involvement are needed.

Smaller-scale Panel Studies

Other more targeted longitudinal studies are interested in contact between parents who may not be living together. The U.S. Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study baseline

interviews were conducted between June 1999 and October 2000. It is not a random survey of families but follows a new cohort of unwed parents and their children over four years. New mothers were interviewed in the hospital within 48 hours of their child's birth, and fathers are interviewed either in the hospital or elsewhere as soon as possible after the birth. In this study there is a particular interest in fathers, and issues being investigated include expectations about fathers' rights and responsibilities, mother-father relationships, and how many fathers want to be involved in raising their children.

Time-use Surveys

In order to obtain more comprehensive estimates of relative time spent with custodial and non-custodial parents, and, as importantly, some idea of what activities were carried out during this time, time use surveys techniques are needed. Time use study methodologies are still evolving. Increasingly there is an interest in determining time use patterns of both partners in intact couples, along with the time use of children in households.

The 1997 Child Development Supplement to the PSID (now called PSID CDS-I) has been used to examine accessibility and engagement with children by fathers and mothers in intact families (Hofferth and Anderson, 2003; Yeung *et al*, 2001). Data were collected through the use of a 24-hour diary time diary administered to 1,761 children aged 0-12 in 1997. Each family was asked to complete a diary for a pre-assigned random weekday and weekend day. In terms of who completed the diary it was noted "[t]he primary caregiver of the target child, in most cases the mother, was the preferred respondent in cooperation with the target child, when possible (p. 139)." This resulted in 60 percent of diaries being completed by the mothers alone, 6 percent completed by the child alone, and 12 percent by the mother and target child, 15 percent by someone else in the household (a grandmother or other relative) with 7 percent having information missing on who completed the diary. All the children who self completed the diaries were 9 years or older. The authors recognize the potential for bias when fathers were not involved in completing the questionnaire. While breaking new ground in the study of time spent by fathers and mothers with children, Yeung *et al* (2001: 53) note there is a need to go beyond researching only intact two parent families and "[a]n important area of study for future research will be to compare paternal involvement in intact families with that in stepparent and single-parent families [more accurately, single-parent households]."

The in-process PSID CDS-II, which is recontacting the CDS-I families still in the PSID as

of 2001, repeats time diary collection for children, but again omitting any involvement from fathers in that part of the data collection process. It also asks a small set of questions of the primary caregiver about any separated parent. However, no attempt is made to interview separated parents directly.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has a time use survey in-process which directly addresses issues both of the existence of non-resident children and the amount of time parents spend with them. Given the large sample size of 2000 individuals surveyed per month throughout the year (24,000 annually) it is likely that a significant number of far parents will be included. Respondents will be first asked a shortened version of the NSFH question.

"Do you have any children under 18 who do not live with you?"

Age and sex of each such child will be identified, and these children will be added to the household's roster of persons individually and uniquely identified. These non-resident children will be readily identifiable, having been given a relationship code of "non-household child." During the administration of the diary, the BLS will ask respondents who was with them. Each person on the roster will have a unique code, so time with each individual child, resident or not, will be recorded for any activity reported in the diary. Diary time with the parent actively and directly engaged with a child will count as child care time. This provides a picture of child care as a primary activity. To gain a more complete picture of who is caring for children and to identify the activities that adults combine with child care, the BLS will also measure secondary child care – times when the parent is indirectly involved with a child but still mindful of, and responsible for, the child. For secondary care BLS has chosen to focus on children under the age of 13 and to employ summary questions built off the time diary, asking them of all children mentioned in the time diary and of non-resident children even if not mentioned in the diary. Here, though, the emphasis is on identifying activities done in conjunction with child care rather than time spent with specific children. Hence, the BLS study's approach would identify, separately for non-resident children, active but not passive care.

The BLS survey offers the promise of obtaining useful data on the time nonresidential parents spend with their children.⁸ Agencies developing time use surveys need to watch closely the results emerging from the BLS survey. If this is successful, then such questions should

⁸ One element that appears to present special challenges and has the potential to dramatically affect estimates of time spent in secondary childcare is the time when parents and/or children are sleeping. In light of evidence showing inconsistency across respondents in their reporting of childcare time in such situations, BLS imposed a rule that child care would be defined to occur when, and only when, the respondent and at least one child were awake (Schwartz 2002).

become standard practice in surveys. The BLS survey should yield reliable estimates at the aggregate level,⁹ and the time-diary approach offers the opportunity for identifying important types of parent-child interaction that researchers might not anticipate when developing the fixed questions for more conventional survey approaches. Furthermore, the BLS approach has the advantage of obtaining this information from the nonresidential parent.

Time use surveys can, however, obtain some information on care of children from the custodial parent. Gershuny (2002) suggests that after the day diary, all dependent children could be routed through a loop route that repeats back the diary sequence to the respondent as follows:

"Now, you told me that between (t and t+1) you were doing (activity Y):

During that time, was (child p, q, r etc) at school/playschool/
under care of another adult/your responsibility?"

In this way it would be possible to obtain a complete "care schedule" for each child, which can then be set against the adults' diary to see how the overall child-responsibility patterns relate to the childcare-as-primary activity pattern. While this would have the added advantage of gathering some basic information on all forms of childcare, there may also be the potential for bias in reporting.

Administrative Data

Some administrative datasets can be used to measure official child support payments between separated parents. These include databases of tax and welfare agencies. Blank and Ellwood (2002) note that a key part of the US welfare reform was to strengthen child support enforcement. This process involves several steps: establishing paternity, getting an award in place and determining the amount of the award, locating the far parent, and collecting the award. Blank and Ellwood report that there were major problems in locating far fathers as administrative datasets provided limited information, and this was exacerbated by having a high proportion of interstate cases. They note that a vast new system has now been put in place to track these parents. This includes a national new hire reporting system where employers are required to collect and immediately report to the state the names and Social Security numbers of all new hires. There was also expanded data matching and new penalties introduced for those with unpaid

⁹ The small sampling of diary days per person, however, limits the accuracy of micro-level estimates of activities done infrequently or irregularly – activities such as care of [separated](#) children. To provide reliable micro-level time-diary estimates of time children spend with [a far](#) parent, the sample of days per child would ideally include weekend and weekdays and several days rather than just one or two. Unfortunately, BLS will not have this expansive sample of days per person. Questions will focus primarily on activities done the day prior to the interview.

child support. However, the administrative based measures omit payments that are made in a variety of non-official ways (Coley, 2001) and they provide no information on emotional support.

As already discussed, some far fathers (and mothers) pose a danger to their children through domestic violence, drug use, or mental illness. However, there are also situations where the fathers (or mother) pose a danger to the former partner but not to the child. This is where the mother (or father) play a difficult "gatekeeper" role and where outside agencies often are required to play a role in ensuring access. These organizations can potentially also play a role in providing data on such access.

Institutional Populations

A large share of men living in institutional settings, whether prison or the military are fathers, yet large-scale national surveys of the otherwise total population generally exclude the institutionalized population (Cherlin and Griffith, 1998). Some special surveys, though, focus exclusively on the institutionalized population. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) initiates numerous surveys of inmates in prisons, halfway houses, or probation agencies. These include the Survey of Adults on Probation (SAP), the Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities (SISCF), the Survey of Inmates in Federal Correctional Facilities (SIFCF), and the Survey of Inmates in Local Jails (SILJ) Although most of the content in these surveys is focused on criminal justice issues, questions have been asked about father involvement with children before incarceration and current contact with children.

LANGUAGE AND RESEARCH: ENHANCED PERSPECTIVE

We now turn to ways of better seeing across-household connections in biological families by adapting language, accompanying concepts, and data collection approaches for a better fit. This involves a conceptual shift in structuring 'family' and reorientation in collecting data, and details regarding suggested changes are outlined for several illustrative research contexts. To spotlight the proposed new, or currently infrequently used, terms, the relevant subsection heading appends the terms in italics. We begin with an underlying reconceptualization of biological family with members in different households.

Underlying Conceptual Model for Framing Questions and Language:

‘Mother - Child - Father Triad’

‘Gatekeeper’ and ‘key’

Our suggested reconceptualization follows in the footsteps of the Cherlin and Griffith (1998) suggestion of bringing network analysis to bear on the issues. While it does not fully incorporate the approach of network analysis, it does borrow constructs and terms to describe a perspective that allows for across-household construction of biological family. Underlying the approach is the idea of ‘family’ as a network of actors potentially connected by ties or interactions that can be viewed very differently by individual family members. At a minimum, the two biological parents and the child all need to be considered together in the context of a network. Ideally, other important family members such as partners of parents, grandparents, siblings, etc. should be taken into account also, but a manageable start for obtaining a better view of biological family is to concentrate on the threesome of the two biological parents and the child, whether or not they reside in the same household. In accordance with the underlying tenant of network analysis, the focus is on the attributes of the connections between the network ‘nodes’ (the potential family members), not the attributes of the people in the network.

The threesome – mother, child, and father -- constitutes, in the language of social network analysis, a ‘triad,’ and each individual in the triad is an ‘actor.’ Within the triad, each pair of actors (a pair of actors constitutes a ‘dyad’) may or may not be connected by relational ties of a social, emotional, financial, or physical nature. The triad concept moves beyond the traditional approach of considering mother-child, father-child, or mother-father dyads separately to thinking of them collectively. These dyads are subsumed under the triad. The relational ties potentially connecting the actors are ‘directional’ (flowing from one actor to another) and may or may not be mutual (going in both directions). Parenting ties tend to be interactions that flow from parent to child, rather than mutual.

Each parent can exhibit a parenting role with regard to the child and a partner or former-partner role with regard to the other parent. The child plays a dependent role as recipient of parenting (receiving from parents); however, the child, like the parents, is an active agent and can both react to the parenting and initiate actions (both sent to parents). The nature of the biological family is shaped by the ways all three actors play their roles, with residency ties serving as a structural element that can facilitate or impede other types of ties.

Use of the triad concept in research thus far suggests an important structural element regarding the triad. For situations with a far parent, the literature has identified what appears to

be a ‘gatekeeper’ (Carlson, McLanahan, and Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Coley and Chase-Lansdale, 1999). Given the legal and social structures of the U.S. and many other industrialized countries, and aided by being in a separate household, the resident parent is in a position to make or break connections between the nonresident parent and the child (and potentially make or break researchers’ ability to know anything about the nonresident parent). The quality of ties (e.g., extent of trust, respect, etc.) between the resident parent and nonresident parent appears to determine whether or not this structural element is activated, and, if so, to what degree (National Center on Fathers and Families, n.d.). The nature of their relationship is the ‘key’ that may lock, or possibly unlock, the nonresident’s door to active parenting. With a defective key (low quality relations – including domestic violence - between the parents), the nonresident parent can become an ‘isolate’ – a lone actor disconnected from his/her child’s family life. The whole nature of the functioning of the biological family network (and this could apply to intact two-parent families as well) may hinge on the quality of this ‘key.’ Knowing more about ‘gatekeepers’ and the ‘key’ can be important to research and policy development relevant to far parents and their children, as well as the gatekeepers themselves.

Identifying and Characterizing a Separated Parent:

‘Separated Child’

‘Gatekeeper’ and ‘key’

‘Cooperative/Uncooperative’ Parents

Accurate estimates of the number of far parents, their characteristics (including number of separated children), and their behavior are hard to come by.

Current limitations. Central to problems of viewing a far parent (typically the father) as parents is they are rarely asked if they are parents. The common approach is to rely on a near parent (typically the mother) for information about the far parent’s parenting activities. This is the predominant approach taken in past research (Cherlin and Griffith, 1998; Schaeffer, Seltzer, and Dykema, 1998; Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994; National Center on Fathers and Families, n.d.), in part because mothers have been considered children’s major socializing agent (Coley, 2001) and in part because resident parents are readily identifiable as parents (Schaeffer, Seltzer, and Dykema, 1998). However, limiting the perspective on parenting to a single parent is particularly problematic when parents are not part of a couple, and research indicates wide disparities between near mothers’ and far fathers’ reports of the parenting activity of the far fathers (Schaeffer,

Seltzer, and Dykema, 1998; Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994; Braver, et al., 1991).

To compound the problem, on the occasions when they have been asked to identify themselves as separated parent, many separated fathers have foregone the opportunity. Evidence for this is based on comparative estimates of the number of separated fathers obtained in different ways. Using resident mothers' reports of the existence of a nonresident father for the 'true' count of total number of nonresident fathers, Sorensen (1997) uses NSFH data for a comparative estimate based on nonresident fathers' responses to a direct question about having any children elsewhere. Her findings suggest that NSFH identifies only 56% of the nonresident fathers. Indications are that roughly two-thirds of the nonresident fathers missed with the direct question were missed because they reported having no children living elsewhere.

Sorensen also investigates, with SIPP data, an indirect approach to identifying nonresident fathers, one based primarily on comparing self-reports of fertility history with counts of number of children in the household. She finds the indirect approach yields counts of nonresident fathers roughly 40% higher than NSFH's direct-question approach. The characteristics of nonresident fathers, however, were similar whether they were identified indirectly or via self-identification. Hence, either a direct question to men asking about separated children, or an indirect approach identifying nonresident fathers by gathering and comparing fertility histories and household listings, appears to provide a more accurate picture than one based on resident mothers' reports.

Sorensen's indirect method of identification seems to be superior to the direct method in terms of identifying more separated fathers; however, that approach provides no information about the separated children (since the men are not identified as separated fathers at the time of interview). In addition, it too appears to undercount separated fathers (by roughly 20%), and the undercount is rooted in the same source as the undercount from direct questions-- men's underreport of their fertility. Research indicates that men's reports of fertility yield downwardly biased estimates of children ever born (Rendall, 1999; Cherlin, Griffith and McCarthy, 1983). It is this tendency for men to underreport having children that is driving a large part of the undercount of non-custodial fathers with either direct questions or indirect estimation.

Noncoverage is also a major problem in identifying separated fathers. Sizable numbers of separated fathers are not captured by surveys because they are in group quarters-- such as prisons or military barracks --and hence not included in household-based surveys. In addition, some subgroups likely to include a large proportion of separated fathers (e.g., African American males in their early 30s) tend to be missed in surveys and censuses. Sorensen (1997) estimates that

about 75% of separated fathers missing in SIPP are missing because they are institutionalized, in subgroups that tend to be undercounted, or living in other group quarters. Garfinkel, McLanahan and Hanson (1998) also point to a significant number of separated fathers (and presumably some separated mothers) living in settings that are often omitted from surveys.

Enhanced perspective. Despite undercounts from some separated fathers choosing not to acknowledge their separated children, direct questions appear to yield a better picture of separated fathers than do proxy reports by conjunct mothers. This suggests that research on issues relating to separated parents could be substantially enhanced with an added question in the CPS (and other surveys as well) along the lines of the NSFH and the recently initiated BLS questions. Instead of asking this as a negative question (do you have children who do not live with you/in the household, as with NSFH and BLS), however, it could be asked as “Do you have any biological or adopted children aged 18 or younger who live elsewhere?” This could be followed up with questions about the number of such children and where the “elsewhere” is – in the home of another parent, in boarding school, in college, in hospital, etc. With this set of questions, both separated parents and separated children are counted.

With such a set of questions it would also be possible to identify the parents of children who had been permanently adopted out, were in foster care, or were living with relatives other than a conjunct parent. While adding such a question set does not provide any indication of the amount or nature of interaction with such children, it would allow researchers to better identify the employment, income, housing and other living circumstances of separated parents. A short set of additional questions could be used to obtain a crude assessment of the extent to which far parents who are willing to identify themselves as such are, in fact, involved parents. The additional questions could be something along the lines of:

‘Do you know what either their favorite TV programs or books or games are?’

‘Do you know at least one parent of each of their best friends?’

Such a question sequence was tested in the 2003 Detroit Area Study, a small cross-sectional survey of the tri-county Detroit metropolitan area, and found to yield reasonable patterns of results. Adults were more likely to answer ‘yes’ to both of these questions when the children were living with them than when the children were living elsewhere. In addition, the second question yielded fewer ‘yes’ responses than the first, which is consistent with knowing a parent of their children’s best friends being a higher level of involvement than knowing children’s favorite things. The difference in percentage knowing children’s favorite things versus knowing a parent

of the children's friends was larger for separated parents than for conjunct parents. Roughly 70 percent of the far parents who identified themselves as such reported knowing their separated children's favorite things but only about 40 percent reported knowing a parent of the children's best friends.

Panel surveys following biological parents and children through time regardless of their residential location offer good opportunities for identifying separated parents and separated children and gauging the type and amount of interaction between them. Indeed, that is the design being followed by the U.S. Early Childhood Longitudinal Study at Birth (ECLS-B), a new study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics in collaboration in several other federal agencies (<http://nces.ed.gov/ecls/Birth/studybrief.asp>). In its focus on children's development, health, early care and education, this study interviews both conjunct fathers custodial fathers and separated biological fathers about their roles in their children's lives. It has an extensive interview with the primary caregiver, in most cases the mother or female guardian. And it engages children as study participants with information-gathering activities appropriate to their age level. Children are to be tracked from 9-months of age through the first grade (age 6 or 7).

The time of birth appears to be the best time to identify and enlist biological fathers in such a longitudinal study. Blank and Ellwood (2002) note that nearly 80 % of fathers are present at the birth of the child or visit the hospital, and both parents at the child's birth typically indicate a strong desire that the child's father be known. The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study takes this approach. Similarly, the ECLS-B is enlisting fathers with the aid of children's birth certificates.

A central problem in trying to contact separated parents when their children are older, as the 1997 PSID Child Supplement and others (e.g., Coley and Chase-Lansdale, 1999) have discovered, is conjunct parents declining to provide contact information, and, in effect, acting as a 'gatekeeper' for researcher access to the separated parent. Further research is needed about the concerns underlying this – is it, for example, resistance due to fear about providing information about people outside the household, is it because they do not know the contact information, or is it because they do not want to be linked in any way with the separated parent (former partner), perhaps because the former partner presents a danger to them? What is the 'key' for researchers learning their identity and being able to contact them? This is an issue meriting careful research.

Another vitally important issue is encouraging separated fathers to participate in studies

and provide information about their separated children. Consider assumptions that tend to underlie a term frequently associated with separated fathers – ‘deadbeat dad.’ This term varies from one associated with low-income unwed fathers with difficulty keeping up with child support payments (Reichert, 1999), to being a generic term for separated fathers that portrays them as being able to afford to pay child support but choosing not to, in the process denying their children needed income (Sorensen, 1997). The stigma associated with such images may well be significant. Knowing these are likely images to appear in an interviewer’s mind as soon as a man says he has separated children is not a good incentive for him reporting this. Reducing the stigma associated with being a non-custodial parent may be an important route to improved reporting of this status. Removing ‘deadbeat dad’ from research and popular language is one step that might help. Other measures could include fostering images of successful, involved separated fathers, possibly through policies aimed at recognizing the contributions they make to their children, not only of a financial nature but other ways as well.

Assessing Contributions of a Separated Parent:

‘Two-Household’ Child

‘Two-Home’ Child

‘Shared’ Child

Rooting views of the biological family triad solely in the household containing the children and omitting the separated parent can miss resources provided by separated parents to their children, as well as important aspects of the children’s home environments.

Current limitations. On the financial side, consider child support. A standard approach, in the U.S. and elsewhere, is to collect data on child support payments received by near parents (as part of gross income) but no information on the transfer of that income (expenditure) by the far parent. Taking a New Zealand study of income distribution as an example, O’Dea (2000) argues that household-based analysis of families can miss important inter-household transfers (e.g., far parents’ child support payments to near parents) that remove resources from some households. Birks (2001b) and Hodgson and Birks (2002) explore this issue in more depth and point out further problems when data is not collected on household expenditure. In New Zealand, as in the U.S., it is not uncommon for a far father to spend time with his children on weekends and holidays or overnight stays on weekdays. Not only will this involve direct expenditure on the children, but may also mean that additional household resources, such as an extra bedroom, are required in the separated father’s household for these visits (Reichert, 1999).

Based on simple household data, the measurement of both disposable income and costs of living for the near-parent and far-parent households can be inaccurate. Some households classified as sole-parent households can appear worse off and separated-parent households can appear better off than they actually are. The fact that a child is likely to be spending time in the separated-parent household as well as the conjunct-parent household tends to be ignored.

Enhanced perspective. It is useful to consider the terms ‘two-household’ child, ‘two-home’ child, and ‘shared’ child. The first two terms tend to capture, from children’s perspective, the notion that they alternate between the residences of their different parents. ‘Shared’ child captures this notion from the perspective of the parents. What tends to differentiate the ‘two-household’ and ‘two-home,’ at least in the authors’ minds, is that ‘two-home’ conveys more clearly a situation of joint physical custody. Not all children with separated parents would be classified as ‘two-household’ or a ‘two-home’ child; only those with active separated parents would be. Because some of the resources flowing from active a far parent may not be seen by the near parent (Reichert, 1999), it can be especially important to gather such information from the separated parent. This is something that policy changes might assist with.

Take the example of a recent policy change in Norway, where effects of the policy changes are being monitored in research being undertaken by Statistics Norway (Rønsen, 2002). In Norway a new law regulating maintenance payment of the separated parent was implemented in 2003. The legislation gives more consideration to the time the child(ren) spend with each parent (non-custodial as well as custodial) and to the parents’ relative financial situation. Statistics Norway has designed two surveys, one before and one after the implementation of the new law, to capture changes in:

- (1) time separated children spend with each parent
- (2) the economic well-being of the two households

The pre-implementation survey was completed in 2003 and, when analyzed, will provide baseline information regarding how much time children spend with each parent and the extent of single responsibility that “single parents” really have. It is likely that researchers in other countries, including the U.S., will be able to learn lessons from both these surveys not only in terms of what the data show but as to what approaches work (or do not work) when trying to gather such information, including the extent to which such a policy change might motivate separated parents to claim their status in terms of having separated children.

Characterizing the Situation of Two-household/Two-home Children:

‘Separated Parents’

‘Separated Families’

Characterizations of children’s home environments based solely on the situation of their near parent can be misleading if they spend significant amounts of time in their far parent’s home.

Current limitations. *Child Trends* (2002) shows that even the best-intentioned analysis can be misleading when the data fail to capture important connections between separated parents and their biological children. The report’s emphasis on fathers, along with mothers, is a giant step toward bringing fathers more into the statistical portraits of American families. However, gaps in the data translate to gaps in statistics. *Child Trends* statistics on parents’ time and activities with children, based on PSID 1997 Child Supplement data, fail to take account of far parents’ participation in their children’s lives (due to lack of sufficient data). The report’s estimates of variations in custody arrangement by the economic or marital status of parents similarly fail to register the circumstances of the separated parent (again because data for separated parents were not collected). With sizable fractions of separated children spending at least some time in the home of their far parent, omitting any characterization of that home means an incomplete picture of the children’s circumstances. Circumstances of the near and far parents may be quite different across many dimensions, including marital and economic status (e.g., Smock and Manning, 1997; Hill, 1992).

Expanded perspective. Expanding the view to encompass both homes a separated child spends time in involves being able to link information on the near and far parents at the micro-level. This, in effect, means ‘matching a separated child’s parents.’ One way of accomplishing this is to track the parents and child in a panel study to wherever they are. The other is to find successful ways of obtaining the identity and contact information for the far parent from the near parent.

Parenting and Family Structure Framework:

‘Mother - Child - Father Triad’

‘Active/Inactive’ Parenting

‘Constructive/Destructive’ Parenting

‘Isolate Parent’

For issues relating to parenting by a far parent it is important to consider the mother-child-

father triad in the context of separated parents. For reasons described earlier, it is further important to consider the triad from a child-centered perspective and to consider it in terms of the attributes of the connections between the three network members, not just the attributes of the members themselves. For adequately conveying the complexity of across-household family networks, the underlying conceptual framework for family structure needs to be a blending of social as well as biological relations.

Current limitations. Knowing the amount and type of interaction taking place across the biological family network is important when assessing outcomes for children. Literature on this issue, though, has tended to place particular emphasis on family structure as a key factor in child development. Information about family structure (defined in various ways but usually differentiating between one-parent households and two-parent households) has been the foundation for testing some theories concerning the influence of parents on children's development (see, for example, McLanahan, 1988; Hill, Yeung, and Duncan, 2001).

For example, social control theory views adult supervision and monitoring of childhood behaviors as important means by which children are kept from engaging in problem behaviors, and what have been designated as key aspects of the theory are the number and types of adults overseeing children. Similarly, role model theory focuses on parents as examples that children use to shape their values, expectations, preferences, and behavior. And the economic deprivation hypothesis draws on economic theory in that two earners in a household are more likely to keep a child out of poverty. In testing these theories, as in media and political debates, comparisons are often made between children raised primarily in one-parent households and those in two-parent households (e.g. Blankenhorn, 1995).

However, rather than focusing on the physical living arrangements (and even at times operating under the false assumption that two-parent households containing stepparents are equivalent to two-biological-parent households) it may be more important to look to the myriad array of possible interactions that build ties across the mother-child-father triad, some of which can be measured in terms of the amount and quality of time parents (both separated parents and intact couples) spend with children. The interaction, rather than the presence or absence of a parent from the child's observed household, may well prove the more important. For instance, in an intact family a 'near' father, perhaps through working long hours or frequent traveling, could spend little time with his children, whereas a 'far' father may be spending significant amounts of quality time with his children.

Enhanced perspective. The typical survey approach of directing questions to parents about involvement with their separated children assumes that the parent is the unit of analysis, not the child. For improving understanding of the biological family network, we argue for moving to a higher plane that facilitates assessing perspectives across the entire triad, including the child's view of family life. Knowledge about the child's perspective is an important element in accomplishing this.

In a range of large-scale surveys it may be relatively easy to ask children (or the near parent of very young children) about interaction with the far parent. At a minimum this could help clarify the size of biases in reports by near parents and far parents about time spent by children (particularly older children, who could self-report) with the other parent. Such questions could be added, for example, to time use surveys where particular events might be rare and therefore unlikely to occur on a diary day. In doing so, it is important to keep in mind that the needs of children can be highly individualized and the type of attention and interaction effective at satisfying those needs can be highly variable. Such an approach would also raise complex problems in terms of informed consent and related ethical approval issues. And there are age limits under which children could not respond. For matters affecting children, though, the perspective of children – not just parents – merits consideration in our language, in research, and in policies.

For reorienting the construct of 'family structure' to one based more on the interactions of all members of the triad, while also taking account of whether the triad contains separated parents or together parents, consider the following typology system as a framework for researching family structure. There are three important dimensions of ties (or interactions) added to the usual 'mother' and 'father' relationship classification system – whether parents are 'near' (N) or 'far' (F); whether each parent is 'active' (A), 'inactive' in parenting (I), or an isolate from the separated child (L); and whether the parents are 'cooperative' (C), 'uncooperative' (U), or out of touch (O) with each other in their family-related behavior.¹⁰ These are building blocks, or in the language of network analysis 'primitives,' from which family types can be constructed. Table 1 shows the resulting combinations of family types that emerge from such a typology system. The family structure types listed in the right-most column assume a convention of the mother's involvement in parenting being registered to the left in the 'chained' relationship, father's

¹⁰ One further complication not considered here is that it is also possible that the child itself might be cooperative or uncooperative in spending time with a far parent. There could be many influences on this, such as the far parent's house being away from normal school friends.

involvement in parenting to the right, the quality of the relationship between the two parents indicated by the middle element in the chain, subscripts N or F indicating if the parent is ‘Near’ or ‘Far,’ and the subscript ‘t’ showing time is also a relevant element. This affords a much richer view of ‘family structure’ than the typical one of merely counting the number of parents present in the child’s usual household.

This classification system points to important structural aspects of the triad network to consider when evaluating the extent to which a particular family type tends to yield ‘constructive’ parenting (beneficial to the child) versus ‘destructive’ parenting (harmful to the child). It lays bare the assumptions that often underlie comparisons of effects of one-parent households versus two-parent households on children’s development.

If, for example, a researcher wanted to assess the extent to which separated parenting affects children, the researcher would want to compare, for together-parenting triads versus separated-parenting triads, children in family structures with the same configuration of active/inactive parenting and the same cooperative/uncooperative relationship between parents. That involves making comparisons between, say:

together-parenting triads ($A_{N,t}-C-A_{N,t}$) with

separated-parenting triads in the set ($A_{N,t}-C-A_{F,t}$) and ($A_{F,t}-C-A_{N,t}$).

This is a comparison between a cooperative couple actively parenting their child and cooperative separated parents actively parenting their child. If the interest is in effects of far fathers, the comparable comparison is between triads with structure ($A_{N,t}-C-A_{N,t}$) and triads with structure ($A_{N,t}-C-A_{F,t}$). Or to see if, among separated-parent triads with cooperative parents, active parenting of far fathers is beneficial to children, a researcher could compare:

($A_{N,t}-C-A_{F,t}$) triads with ($A_{N,t}-C-I_{F,t}$) triads, as well as

($I_{N,t}-C-A_{F,t}$) triads with ($I_{N,t}-C-I_{F,t}$) triads.

This classification system produces 8 different types of together-parenting triads and 20 types of separated-parenting triads. Relative to the standard family structure classification system, it puts more demands on the data both in terms of sample size needed for analysis and measures needed (assessments of active/inactive parenting for both parents as well as assessments of cooperative/uncooperative relations between them). However, it offers the possibility of being able to view the biological family triad in its entirety and control for dimensions that can otherwise misrepresent the impact of separated parenting (as well as together-parenting). It is a useful framework for framing research approaches even if it cannot be fully implemented.

Implementation of would make great demands on data, with multiple reporters across the triad addressing potentially highly sensitive issues. To boot, as the time subscript on the family structure types indicates, social connections can change over time; hence, one-time measurement is not fully adequate. Qualitative research could help investigate how useful and feasible this approach to family structure is before attempting to gather the needed data in a large survey. For now, we offer it as a way of moving toward in a new vocabulary and underlying conceptual model for capturing the complex lived realities of biological families-- a way of combining the social network analysis concepts and terminology with standard statistical approaches to help identify types of separated-parent networks that provide constructive parenting and, hence, work toward the benefit of children.

CONCLUSION

In policy debates children's families are still commonly portrayed as comprised either of intact two-parent families (biological or stepparent) or 'single-parent families.' Yet, there is considerable diversity in parenting arrangements, and one major group is often overlooked. These are the children of separated biological parents who, to varying degrees, have two active parents and two households. Despite the prevalence of this separated family type in all industrialized countries, much is yet to be learned about it, especially from the perspective of the children in these families. This paper is an attempt to contribute to research and discussions on this topic by blending children's perspective with parents' perspectives, adding social relational ties in with biological ties as a way of classifying family types, and bringing this all to bear on the vocabulary of 'family.'

There are many reasons why researchers and policy makers need to better understand how separated families operate. These range from a need to better understand parental influences on child development, through the time parents invest in their children's lives, and a need to know what child custody arrangements really are in the "best interests" of the child, through to specific public policy issues such as determining income adequacy for children and designing childcare support systems. Entire areas of research, such as identifying what works well and what works poorly in terms of the interactions and parenting strategies of separated parents, would open up with research bridging their separate households.

Studies in planning, especially those specifically focused on children,¹¹ would serve the research and policy-making communities well by developing a design which facilitated gathering information about the environments of children with parents in separate households. Signs of this happening are encouraging. Indications are that the National Children's Study is grappling with these issues. This, along with developments in the BLS time use survey design, show there is some broad recognition that new data collections need to gather information about family relationships running across households.

Existing data collections, including the CPS Supplement, could improve representation of families spanning multiple households with the addition of a small question set asking separated parents to identify themselves as such. Careful tracking by longitudinal surveys of separated parents at the time they separate and beyond would go a long way in keeping the research community and policy makers informed about the circumstances and behavior of biological parents separated from their children. At times there is also value in looking beyond households when considering connections children have with parents. Separated parents living in non-household dwellings, such as prisons, can be important to many issues pertaining to children.

It is clear that in both intact and in separated families, mothers, fathers and children may have significantly different perceptions of who are central figures in their lives and how emotional and financial investments flow between family members. In line with the concept of a 'triad,' mother reports, father reports and, where possible, child based reports are important. Such a "triangulated" approach, along with multiple methods for analyzing the data, will help researchers and policy makers gain a better understanding of how increasingly complex families operate.

The idea of bringing children's "voices" more into research has, in part, been prompted in some countries by a desire to comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Complying with this convention places the child at the center of family policy making. Yet, it is recognized there are some major challenges in bringing children's voices to the fore. There are major consent and other ethical issues to confront, and there are questions with regards to the age at which a child is capable of providing a credible source of data.

The triangulated approach, which includes children's voices, makes great demands on both researchers and the data; hence, qualitative research could be helpful in focusing and honing

¹¹ An example of a study that would serve the research community well by careful handling of across-household families is the National Children's Study, a cohort study intending to track approximately 100,000 children from pre-birth until age 21, focused on environmental influences on children's health and development.

the measures likely to be of most importance. The analytical framework made possible with such steps might well spur new analytical techniques and possibly new software for researching complex, across-household family networks and what they mean for members of the family network.

Although the issues of across-household families are becoming better understood, and data on shared parenting arrangements is becoming increasingly available in the U.S., the language of research and policy debates is lagging behind the changes in family types. Even writing this paper presented major challenges to the authors as to what terms to use to describe biological parents who no longer live full time with their children. Many of the words currently used such as ‘non-custodial’ parent, ‘non-resident’ parent, through to terms such as ‘deadbeat dad,’ all have connotations of exclusion rather than inclusion. Terms that we experimented with and rejected, such as ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ parents, also have these connotations. In some situations this will reflect reality, but in others the terms are misleading. Equally, terms that are more neutral, such as ‘separated’ parent, result in some loss of information as to where the child resides. In the end we chose to use the terms ‘near’ and ‘far’ parent when some idea of residency was important, but used the terms ‘separated’ parent and ‘separated’ child in most other contexts open to new terminology. The literature and some contexts are inherently tied to more traditional terms. Hence, what this paper suggests is an expansion of vocabulary, not a complete substitution of a new language for the old.

We urge careful attention to language. While most researchers try to differentiate between single-parent households and single-parent families, and the language of children living in ‘two-parent households’ is entering into print (e.g., Kauffman Early Education Exchange, 2002; Dubow, Roecker, & D’Imperio, 2001), the term ‘single-parent family’ can still be found in many research publications even when it is quite clear that the children involved have two active parents. The term ‘single-parent family’ is also commonly used in policy debates and in everyday language.

Bringing language fitted to the changing times into usage may be more of a challenge for the U.S., particularly in the policy arena, than for other countries, such as Norway and New Zealand. Relative to those countries, the U.S. has been slow to move from only considering legally married couples in studies of families (or family-related activities such as counts of working mothers) to include cohabiting (defacto) couples and never-co-residing parents; same-sex couples have only recently become recognized in official U.S. surveys. Other countries have a

longer history of considering these diverse forms of family and may find it easier to make the next transition of moving beyond the household.

It has long been understood that language is important in shaping our understanding of the world. Strauss (1959: 15), for example stresses the importance of language on the information and transformation of identity, noting “[a]ny name is a container; poured into it are the conscious or unwitting evaluations of the namer;” furthermore, altering names is “a rite of passage” with a passage to a “new self image” (Strauss, 1959: 16, 17). The use of new more accurate terms, such as ‘near’ and ‘far’ parent, ‘separated’ child, ‘two-household’ child, and ‘mother-child-father triad’ are worth exploring as “a rite of passage” moving research and policy-making to a better fit with the complex realities of 21st century families.

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Table 1: New Family Typology: Blending Social and Biological Relations

<u>Mother</u>	<u>Relationship Between Mother and Father</u>	<u>Father</u>	<u>Family Type (‘Chained’ Relationship)</u>
Together-Parenting Triads:			
Near/Active	Cooperative	Near/Active	$A_{N,t}-C_t-A_{N,t}$
Near/Active	Cooperative	Near/Inactive	$A_{N,t}-C_t-I_{N,t}$
Near/Inactive	Cooperative	Near/Active	$I_{N,t}-C_t-A_{N,t}$
Near/Inactive	Cooperative	Near/Inactive	$I_{N,t}-C_t-I_{N,t}$
Near/Active	Uncooperative	Near/Active	$A_{N,t}-U_t-A_{N,t}$
Near/Active	Uncooperative	Near/Inactive	$A_{N,t}-U_t-I_{N,t}$
Near/Inactive	Uncooperative	Near/Active	$I_{N,t}-U_t-A_{N,t}$
Near/Inactive	Uncooperative	Near/Inactive	$I_{N,t}-U_t-I_{N,t}$
Separated-Parenting Triads:			
Near/Active	Cooperative	Far/Active	$A_{N,t}-C_t-A_{F,t}$
Near/Active	Cooperative	Far/Inactive	$A_{N,t}-C_t-I_{F,t}$
Near/Inactive	Cooperative	Far/Active	$I_{N,t}-C_t-A_{F,t}$
Near/Inactive	Cooperative	Far/Inactive	$I_{N,t}-C_t-I_{F,t}$
Near/Active	Uncooperative	Far/Active	$A_{N,t}-U_t-A_{F,t}$
Near/Active	Uncooperative	Far/Inactive	$A_{N,t}-U_t-I_{F,t}$
Near/Inactive	Uncooperative	Far/Active	$I_{N,t}-U_t-A_{F,t}$
Near/Inactive	Uncooperative	Far/Inactive	$I_{N,t}-U_t-I_{F,t}$
Near/Active	Out of touch	Far/Isolate	$A_{N,t}-O_t-L_{F,t}$
Near/Inactive	Out of touch	Far/Isolate	$I_{N,t}-O_t-L_{F,t}$
Far/Active	Cooperative	Near/Active	$A_{F,t}-C_t-A_{N,t}$
Far/Active	Cooperative	Near/Inactive	$A_{F,t}-C_t-I_{N,t}$
Far/Inactive	Cooperative	Near/Active	$I_{F,t}-C_t-A_{N,t}$
Far/Inactive	Cooperative	Far/Inactive	$I_{F,t}-C_t-I_{N,t}$
Far/Active	Uncooperative	Near/Active	$A_{F,t}-U_t-A_{N,t}$
Far/Active	Uncooperative	Near/Inactive	$A_{F,t}-U_t-I_{N,t}$
Far/Inactive	Uncooperative	Near/Active	$I_{F,t}-U_t-A_{N,t}$
Near/Inactive	Uncooperative	Near/Inactive	$I_{F,t}-U_t-I_{N,t}$
Far/Isolate	Out of touch	Near/Active	$L_{F,t}-O_t-A_{N,t}$
Far/Isolate	Out of touch	Near/Inactive	$L_{F,t}-O_t-I_{N,t}$

NOTE: An assumed convention is: mother’s designation in the ‘chained code’ on the left-hand side and father’s designation on the right-hand side. ‘Primitive-code’ designations are as follows: Subscripts N=near, F=far designate the status of the biological parents and t designates time; letters A=active, I=inactive designate the social relationship with the child, and C=cooperative, and U=Uncooperative designate the social relationship between the parents.

Figure 1: Across-Household Ties

