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FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN THE POST-DIVORCE PERIOD:  
DELVING INTO THE NARRATIVES OF DIVORCED FATHERS

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Father-Child Relationships in the Post-Divorce Period: Delving into the Narratives of  
Divorced Fathers

Boşanma Sonrası Baba-Çocuk İlişkileri: Boşanmış Babaların Anlatılarının  
İncelenmesi

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## ABSTRACT

Growing awareness of the importance of fathers in child development and the rise of divorce rates increased the number of academic studies on fathers. This study aims to explore the different dynamics of father-child relationships in the post-divorce period from the perspective of the fathers. Semi-directed in-depth interviews were conducted with twelve noncustodial and nonresidential divorced fathers. The narratives were analyzed with the thematic analysis method. The findings were as follows: The divorce process was considered to be a challenging period by the majority of the fathers. Fathers simultaneously tried to establish a new order and dealt with major concerns related to their relationships with their children. Many factors, and above all the maternal factor, influenced the post-divorce father-child relationship. Fathers' level of anxiety decreased over time, and in many cases the post-divorce father-child relationship improved. None of the fathers ever thought of ceasing contact with their children. Taking into consideration the relationship between involved fatherhood and the socioeconomic level, and looking at the occupations and educational backgrounds of the fathers, this high level of paternal involvement in the post-divorce period might be expected. However, since many fathers divorced recently, it is not possible to make long-term predictions. By giving voice to fathers, this study might contribute to culturally relevant and effective intervention strategies in the post-divorce period. This in turn might reduce rupture in the family, and alleviate the burden of fathers, mothers as well as children.

*Keywords:* Divorce, father, fatherhood, father-child relationship, child custody

## ÖZET

Babanın çocuk gelişimindeki önemine yönelik farkındalığın artışı ve boşanma oranlarının artışı, babalar hakkında yapılan akademik çalışmaların hız kazanmasına sebep olmuştur. Bu çalışma, boşanma sonrası baba-çocuk ilişkisinin farklı dinamiklerini babaların bakış açısından araştırmayı hedeflemektedir. Araştırma kapsamında on iki tane boşanmış ve çocuklarının velayeti anneye verilmiş baba ile yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşme yapılmıştır. Anlatılar, tematik analiz yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Ortaya şu bulgular çıkmıştır: Boşanma süreci çoğu baba tarafından zor bir dönem olarak aktarılmaktadır. Bu süreçte yeni bir düzen kurmaya çalışan babalar, çocuklarıyla ilişkilerine yönelik yoğun kaygılarla da baş etmektedir. Başta anne faktörü olmak üzere birçok farklı etmen boşanma sonrası baba-çocuk ilişkisine etki etmektedir. Babaların kaygılarının zaman içerisinde azaldığı, hatta birçok örnekte boşanma sonrası baba-çocuk ilişkisinin eskiye kıyasla iyileştiği anlaşılmaktadır. Babaların hiçbiri çocuklarının hayatından çıkmayı bir alternatif olarak görmemiştir. Literatürde ilgili babalık ve sosyoekonomik düzey arasındaki ilişki göz önünde bulundurulduğunda ve çalışmadaki babaların mesleklerine ve eğitim durumlarına bakıldığında boşanma sonrasındaki bu dikkat çekici baba varlığı şaşırtıcı değildir. Ancak, birçok babanın yakın tarihlerde boşanmış olmaları, uzun vadeli bir öngörüde bulunmayı zorlaştırmaktadır. Babalara söz hakkı veren bu çalışma, boşanma sonrası dönemde kültürel olarak uygun ve etkin müdahale yöntemlerinin geliştirilmesine katkı sağlayabilir. Bu da boşanmanın yol açtığı ailevi kopuşun etkisini azaltabilir ve sonuç olarak babaların, annelerin ve çocukların yükünü hafifletebilir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Boşanma, baba, babalık, baba-çocuk ilişkisi, velayet

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*To all the fathers who are genuinely trying to understand their children...*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ÖZET.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
CHAPTER 1 .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 FATHERHOOD.....	3
<b>1.1.1 Transition to Fatherhood.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.1.2. Sociocultural Construction of Fatherhood.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.1.3. Gender and Fatherhood: Emergence of Responsible Fathers.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.1.4. Fatherhood in Turkey .....</b>	<b>8</b>
1.2. DIVORCE.....	10
<b>1.2.1. Conceptualization of Divorce and Post-divorce Fatherhood.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.2.2. Predictors of Paternal Involvement in the Post-divorce Period.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1.2.3. The Current Study.....</b>	<b>18</b>
CHAPTER TWO .....	20
METHOD.....	20
2.1. The Primary Investigator (PI) .....	20
2.2. Participants.....	20
2.3. Procedure.....	22
2.4. Data Analysis .....	22
CHAPTER THREE.....	23
RESULTS .....	23
3.1. Becoming a Father .....	24
<b>3.1.1. Backstage of the Transition to Fatherhood.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>3.1.2. Evolution of Father-Child Relationships During Marriage..</b>	<b>28</b>
3.2. Divorce as a Process.....	33
<b>3.2.1. Children as the Litmus Paper of the Marriage.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>3.2.2. Making Decisions Based on the “Sake of the Children”.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>3.2.3. Paternal Anxiety Related to the Child During Divorce .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>3.2.4. The Legal Process.....</b>	<b>38</b>

3.3. Reorganization of the Father-Child Relationship in the Post-Divorce Period	40
<b>3.3.1. Experiences of Children from the Fathers' Perspective</b>	40
<b>3.3.2. Making Sense of Post-divorce Fatherhood: Fathers' Experiences</b>	44
<b>3.3.3. Different Dimensions of the Post-Divorce Father-Child Relationship</b>	49
CHAPTER FOUR	56
DISCUSSION	56
4.1. Conclusion	66
4.2. Limitations and Recommendation for Future Research	68
4.3. Clinical Implications for Future Intervention	69
References	73
Appendix 1. The Consent Form	80
Appendix 2. The Demographic Information Form	82
Appendix 3. Interview Questions	87



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking developments of contemporary times is the growing divorce rates (Amato, 2000; Jekielek, 1998). This has many implications for the society at all levels since its main unit of construction, i.e. the family, is increasingly challenged. Social scientists interested in this subject have been trying to conceptualize the phenomenon with all its ramifications (Amato, 2000; Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen & Booth, 2000; Emery, 1982; Gardner, 1985). Although divorce rates may differ from one country to another, diversity of the countries in which the problem of divorce is under study points out to the existence of a worldwide trend. In Turkey, it has been indicated that 128.411 couples divorced in 2017, whereas 142.448 couples divorced in 2018. This points out to an increase of 10.9% (TÜİK, 2018). Due to the high prevalence of the phenomenon, academic studies are increasingly focusing on the subject of divorce (Akoğlu & Küçükkaragöz, 2018; Kunt, 2004; Yıldırım, 2015).

Researchers elaborate the divorce phenomenon from different perspectives. Since marriage is described as an institution that protects ultimately women and children, research on divorce mainly focuses on the effects of divorce on women and children who are considered to be in a more vulnerable position (Emery, 1982; Jekielek, 1998; Wallerstein, Lewis & Rosenthal, 2013). Consequently, the number of studies on divorced men - a category which is structurally and historically in a more advantageous position when one looks at the power relations - lags behind those on women and children (Shapiro & Lambert, 1999). According to Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson (1998), studies on men remain also to be a major source of controversy due to the sensitivity of issues related to gender inequalities. The authors emphasize how supporters of women's and mothers' rights claim that research on men should not be detrimental to women's rights gained with the efforts of the feminist movements throughout history.

Current literature, however, highlights the importance of fathers' role in the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions of child development (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 1981). The family is considered as a microsystem comprising parts that are in constant interaction with each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Understanding the importance of fathers' in childcare is necessary because fathers may take over some responsibilities of their children and alleviate the burden of their wives while supporting the well-being of children (Doherty et al., 1998). The researchers point out to the fact that "only an ecologically sensitive approach to parenting, which views the welfare of fathers, mothers, and children as intertwined and interdependent, can avoid a zero-sum approach to parenting in which fathers' gains become mothers' losses" (Doherty et al., 1998, p. 277).

Consequently, academic research has become increasingly interested in fathers (Furstenberg, 1988; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Shwalb, Shwalb, & Lamb, 2013). As the number of divorces is growing, it also seems indispensable to analyze the intricate dynamics of post-divorce fatherhood in the contemporary world. "What men do in response to divorce directly affects their children and former wives as well as themselves, and thus has resonance for understanding family processes and transitions" (Arendell, 1992, p. 562). Thus, unless one understands the point of view of men, it seems impossible to understand the experiences of women and children.

There are numerous publications on divorced men (Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Erera & Baum, 2009; Hamer, 1998; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994; Umberson & Williams, 1993). However, since mothers are still considered to be the primary caregivers of the children, research on the dynamics of fatherhood in the post-divorce period is quite limited throughout the world. This is especially true in the case of Turkey where traditional gender roles are dominant, and joint custody is rarely considered an option.

In this study, twelve divorced fathers' feelings and thoughts related to their children, their support systems, challenges they had to deal with, and strategies they mobilized throughout the divorce process were analyzed.

The existing literature will be reviewed in two parts. The first section 'Fatherhood' will include different dimensions of fatherhood: 'Transition to Fatherhood', 'Sociocultural Construction of Fatherhood', 'Gender and Fatherhood: Emergence of Responsible Fathers' and 'Fatherhood in Turkey'. The second part 'Divorce' will be constituted of two sections: 'Conceptualization of Divorce and Post-divorce Fatherhood' will be followed by 'Predictors of Paternal Involvement in the Post-divorce Period'.

## **1.1 FATHERHOOD**

### **1.1.1 Transition to Fatherhood**

There are various challenges in the transition to fatherhood due to multiple uncertainties (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009; Solberg & Glavin, 2018). Mothers and fathers relate to the unborn child differently since the child is inside the mother, but the father has no tangible evidence yet. When birth occurs, the parents' perceptions of the baby as well as their positions in relation to him/her become similar due to the "concretization" of the infant who has put an end to feelings of unreality experienced mostly by fathers (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009; Solberg & Glavin, 2018). However, the journey is still continuing. Rossi (1968) points out to the existence of a general role cycle comprised of four stages. The couple has to go through the first two stages, i.e. the anticipatory stage (pregnancy) and the honeymoon stage (first months following birth) in order to acquire the label of a parent. When full adaptation takes place, there is the plateau stage. The final stage, i.e. the disengagement-termination stage, does not exist in the parental role cycle unless the child or the parents de cease.

During the transition period, parents interact with the baby, look at other parents, remember the way they were brought up by their own parents, and

gradually learn to parent (Bowlby, 1988). In this respect, participation of the fathers in infant care seems to be primordial: Improvement of parental skills paves the way of a positive father self-image. This in turn reduces feelings of exclusion, and fathers become more resilient in dealing with the burden of multiple responsibilities related to the household and the outside world (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009). The authors also underline the importance of “a positive partner relationship in the pre- and postnatal periods, the quality of functioning at work, good quality of life, and availability of social support” (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009, p. 314).

Transition from the role of partner to the role of parent with all its obligations and challenges provokes strong and sometimes negative feelings such as dread, moodiness, irritability, anxiety, frustration and negative perception of self in fathers (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009; Solberg & Glavin, 2018). Consequently, they might have to deal with postpartum depression, a condition equated with women in the past (Solberg & Glavin, 2018). However, despite various challenges, Cox and Paley (2003) underline how the family system as a whole, but also as subsystems and sole individuals, is able to adapt to the new arrangements caused by normative transitions such as child birth. In the end of this process, hopefully, a new equilibrium is formed.

### **1.1.2. Sociocultural Construction of Fatherhood**

Fatherhood is affected by sociocultural factors and changes both historically and contextually (Rotundo, 1985; Shwalb et al., 2013). Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (1981) stress how “fathers play a number of significant roles - companions, care providers, spouses, protectors, models, moral guides, teachers, breadwinners - whose relative importance varies across historical epochs and subcultural groups” (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 1981, p.3). According to the authors, in order to judge fathers’ performances and their influences on the development of their children, it is important to take into account the context in which fatherhood is performed. A father might be considered as a bad father in a certain period of time while he can be seen as a wonderful father in another era. In a similar vein, Doherty et al. (1998)

underline that each generation has its specific cultural ideals of fatherhood. However, there always seems to be a discrepancy between obligations dictated by cultural norms and real practices of the fathers towards their children. Thus, it is not possible to talk of a single fatherhood, but of different types of fatherhood depending on the interaction of cultural, structural and personal variables (Marks & Palkovitz, 2004; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Shwalb et al., 2013).

The sociocultural evaluation of the performance of fatherhood is compatible with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) "ecology of the human development". According to the author, it is not possible to understand human development unless one looks at the interactions between different actors and levels of the whole system. Thus, in order to understand fatherhood, it is necessary to observe the interaction between the different members of the family system on one hand, and the impact of the society with all its components on the family system on the other hand.

When talking about the sociocultural construction of fatherhood, it is necessary to mention the intergenerational transmission of fatherhood since the individual is primarily socialized in the family. Many authors stress that the past and the present are interconnected, and that the birth of the baby revives unconscious memories buried in the past of the parents (Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Bowlby, 1988; Brown, Kogan, & Kim, 2018; Fraiberg, Adelson, & Shapiro, 1975; Freud, 1922). Underlining the continuity between successive generations within a family, Parman (2007) mentions Alain de Mijolla's concept of "unconscious identification phantasies" and continues: "Alain de Mijolla counts fourteen people – the mother, the father, two grandmothers, two grandfathers, four great grandfathers, and four great grandmothers - who have gathered around the crib of the baby<sup>1</sup>" (Parman, 2017, p. 79). In other words, while interacting with their children, although fathers improvise from time to time, they have at their disposal a vast repertoire of practices that they have unconsciously brought from their family history. Similarly, Fraiberg et al. (1975) mention the unconscious existence of past

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Turkish to English by S. Doğan.

generations when raising children. These are “ghosts in the nursery” from the parental past. Fraiberg and her colleagues indicate that parents’ interactions with their own parents during their childhood are reenacted in their present interactions with their own children. According to the authors, unless becoming aware of and appropriating one’s own affective reactions during the actual occurrence of these memories, parents have a tendency to repeat the past in the present. At this point, it is indispensable to remember Freud’s concept of “*repetition compulsion*”: “The patient [here, we can replace it with “father”] cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it... He is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of *remembering* it as something in the past” (Freud, 1922, p. 602).

Analyzing the connection between the relationships of fathers with their own fathers, and their current attitudes towards their children, Beaton and Doherty (2007) found out that two contradictory father-child relationships between the father and his own father may lead to the emergence of the same outcome: Fathers who perceive their own father-child relationship during their childhood as deficient might adopt positive attitudes towards their children. This category of fathers tries to avoid the mistakes committed by their primary caregivers and do their best in order to become better fathers than their own fathers. This is an example of “the compensation hypothesis”. On the other hand, fathers who appreciate the father-child relationship during their childhood might also struggle to be good fathers since they tend to imitate their own fathers who constitute role models for them. This second category illustrates “the modeling hypothesis”. In short, unconsciously, fathers bring childhood memories when interacting with their own children.

### **1.1.3. Gender and Fatherhood: Emergence of Responsible Fathers**

It is not possible to understand the changes in the fatherhood performances of men without taking into account issues related to gender (Boratav, Okman Fişek, & Eslen Ziya, 2018; Sancar, 2009). Selek (2008) underlines how “gender patterns

shaped under the influence of the cultural/social context are not stable categories. Social systems form a gender regime according to the social, political and economic needs. Meanings attributed to gender differences vary according to these needs. In parallel with the shaping of women through different mechanisms, men become mannish via genuine instruments and various rituals that emerged in these social structures<sup>2</sup>". In a similar vein, Davidoff (2009) underlines how industrialization has paved the way to the identification of men with work outside the household, and women with domestic chores and childcare within the home. The segregation of sexes, and the creation of an artificial boundary/hierarchy were legitimized by a naturalist and maternalist discourse emphasizing the maternal instinct, and linking the well-being of the newborn to the degree of self-sacrifice of the mother to the child (Badinter, 2011). In short, there is an intricate relationship between the structure at the macro level, and the performances of individuals at the micro level.

In the last decades, due to growing number of women joining the workforce (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 1981), and discourses related to equal rights of men and women, men are slowly returning home and becoming more active participants in relation to households. Thus, it is possible to see a vast literature about the emergence of a new, responsible fatherhood and the increase of paternal involvement (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 1981, McGill, 2014; Rotundo, 1985). Paternal involvement comprises the "engagement, accessibility and responsibility components" (Pleck, 2007, p.1). Fathers engage with their children when they physically interact with them. They are considered to be accessible when children are able to ask for their help even though they might not be physically present at the moment. Finally, they take on responsibilities when they attend the parent-teacher meetings, make doctors' appointments or spare time in order to discuss the general well-being of the child with the mother.

Various authors point out to the dissolution of the boundaries separating mothers and fathers who are increasingly considered as interchangeable

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from Turkish to English by S. Doğan.

(Furstenberg, 1988; Guignard, 2014; Rehel, 2014; Risman, 1986; Rossi, 1968). Rossi (1968) emphasizes the transformation of traditional gender roles and the blurring of the boundaries between motherhood and fatherhood in contemporary times. Once instrumental skills were attributed to men, and expressive skills to women. Now, it is understood that both men and women have instrumental and expressive skills. Risman (1986) claims that “childhood experiences and sex role socialization do not create inflexible gender typed behavioral patterns. Instead, as structural theory suggests, the situational demands of role requirements influence adult behavior and lead men to mother when they have no wives to depend upon” (Risman, 1986, p.101). In a similar vein, Rehel (2014) underlines how fathers are capable of developing a sense of responsibility similar to that of mothers if structural conditions, for instance paternity leave, are favorable. Furstenberg (1988) mentions the transformation of traditional gender roles that become visible in the emergence of androgynous fathers in contemporary times and claims that “today’s father is at least as adept at changing diapers as changing tires”. Finally, according to Guignard (2014) who points out to the bisexuality of the parental function, the mother and the father have to identify with both maternal and paternal functions when interacting with the child in order to be complete.

However, despite the existence of a slow progress towards a more responsible fatherhood, it seems important to bear in mind that women are still far more involved with children (Marks & Palkovitz, 2004), and that a gap exists between the attitudes and behaviors of fathers. Thus, while discourses may be more egalitarian, practices of the fathers may still be guided by traditional values.

#### **1.1.4. Fatherhood in Turkey**

Under the impact of patriarchy, the father stereotype in Turkey was always traditional. This father was defined as a sexist, authoritarian and distant man. Since he does not believe in the equality of the sexes, he neither does housework, nor contributes to childcare. Identified with the outside world, and considered as the head of the family, the father assumes solely the breadwinning component of the



paternal role (AÇEV report, 2017). This definition of fatherhood inevitably implies a distant father-child relationship. Boratav et al. (2018) underline how the father-child relationships of the past are defined by the words “respect”, “fear”, “distance” and “restriction”. The mother always constitutes a bridge between the father and the children who are separated by clear-cut and rigid boundaries. The expression ‘it is the father who hears the last’ was invented in this context.

Many authors observe a gradual change in fatherhood practices in Turkey (Boratav et al., 2018; Taşkın & Erkan, 2009; Yalçınöz, 2011). Contemporary fathers are less distant, less authoritarian, and simultaneously have recourse to expressive and instrumental skills as a parent. Kağıtçıbaşı (2002) proposes the “family model of emotional/psychological interdependence” in which the material interdependencies decrease while the psychological ones come into the forefront. The inevitable outcome is the overall change of the family system: The status of the father changes, the economic value of the child is replaced by his/her psychological value, and the father-child relationship is transformed.

However, authors also underline how despite the intention of change, there is also a resistance to change (AÇEV report, 2017; Boratav et al., 2018). The dominant father figure in Turkey is still the traditional father who is considered as the breadwinner. This is not surprising since “not all areas of social functioning have changed equally rapidly; cultural values, norms, and attitudes lag behind economics and even actual practices. This is nowhere as evident as in the case of interpersonal relations in general, and gender and family relations in particular. In that context, the culture can still be characterized as traditional, authoritarian, and patriarchal” (Sunar & Fişek, 2005, p.4). Thus, although attitudes change, there seems to be a continuity between the behaviors of fathers of past and present generations.

## **1.2. DIVORCE**

### **1.2.1. Conceptualization of Divorce and Post-divorce Fatherhood**

Divorce rates have increased in contemporary times (Amato, 2000; Jekielek, 1998). For some authors, this will have detrimental effects not only for individuals, but also for societies (Popenoe, 1996; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Rosental, 2013) while for others every case is unique and must be evaluated separately (Coltrane & Adams, 2003). Popenoe (1996) condemns the normalization of divorce in contemporary times. The author underlines how individuals consider divorce as the primary medium to attain personal liberation and self-realization. Coltrane and Adams (2003) reject this pessimistic approach. While accepting the multiple challenges of divorce, the authors underline how divorce can be handled peacefully. They believe that the vilification of divorce is the product of political and moralist intentions, a discursive and social construction which focuses mainly on worst-case scenarios in order to legitimize the putting into practice of a more conservative lifestyle based on traditional gender roles. They also underline how children are put into the forefront in order to agitate the public opinion. While divorce might cause an “acute distress syndrome” in children due to separation from one parent – this parent usually being the father – it is a well-known fact that when serious interparental conflict exists within the household, divorce is a salvation and not a burden, both for the children and the parents (Emery, 1982).

Amato (2000) established a divorce-stress-adjustment model according to which marital dissolution cannot be reduced to a discrete event. It is rather a relatively long process depending on the specific conditions of the marriage. Thus, it is preceded by a string of events and “a series of family transitions and reorganizations follow separation and marital dissolution” (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1985). In Amato’s model (2000), stressors and moderators interact with each other and the outcome determines whether it is possible to talk of a ‘chronic strain model’ or a ‘crisis model’. In the chronic strain model, the individuals are affected by the negative consequences of divorce for a longer period of time while in the crisis model they manage to move on despite a difficult transitional period.

According to the author, the moderators are individual, interpersonal and structural resources, the definition and meaning attributed to divorce and demographic characteristics of the couple. Potential stressors influencing adults are the sole parenting responsibility for the custodial parent, the loss of custody of children for the noncustodial parent, loss of emotional support, continuing conflict with ex-spouse, economic decline and other stressful divorce-related events. In the case of children, there is loss of contact with one parent, decline in parental support, continuing conflict between parents, economic decline and other stressful divorce-related events.

As the custody of the child is usually given to the mother following divorce, father-child relationship in the post-divorce period is a great concern for researchers (Hamer, 1998; Kruk, 1992). Maldonado (2006) underlines how a broader definition of post-divorce father involvement must be made in order to take into account the social and emotional components – and not only the economic ones – of paternal contributions. Fathers contribute to the lives of their children in many different ways: They spend time with them, they discipline them, they provide emotional support, they give care, and they serve as role models. Likewise, Mott (1990) criticizes a dichotomous view of father presence (either total absence or total presence) and claims that there is rather a flux: “Father’s physical presence in the home is only one (although probably the most important) manifestation of a father’s presence in a child’s life” (Mott, 1990, p.500). Thomas, Krampe and Newton (2008) talk of “the father’s presence” which is not physical, but psychological: The authors claim that “in its broadest sense, it is based on the child’s relationship with his or her father, his or her attitudes about the father, and the effects of significant others on both the paternal relationship and attitudes about the father”. Therefore, “father presence is a characteristic of the offspring, not of the parent” (Thomas et al., 2008, p. 532). The father, as an internal object, acts as a prompter in the psyche of the child. While growing up, the child has internalized the thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviors of the father. These, in turn, continuously shape the child’s thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviors at an unconscious level. In this sense, the father is

always present within the child. In short, there seems to be a continuum: Fathers might have different ways of being present in the lives of their children, and this presence might be at different levels.

The nature of the father-child relationship also changes following divorce. Looking at the nonresidential father-child interactions following the dissolution of the marital union, Stewart (1999) observes that fathers prefer recreational activities outside of the routine of the child when they visit their children. The 'Disneyland type' interaction is interpreted as an evasion from paternal responsibilities and as permissive parenting by some of the custodial mothers. However, comparing the activities of nonresidential mothers and fathers, the author concludes that the choice of recreational activities has no relation to the gender variable, and that it can be explained by the nonresidential parent status. Feeling emotional pain due to physical separation from children, dealing with feelings of inadequacy as a parent, fearing rejection by children and restricted by their tight schedules, these fathers prefer fun, interesting and conflict-free activities that would guarantee the preservation of the father-child bond.

Although father-child contact following divorce is crucial for the healthy development of the child (Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009), it is not uncommon to witness the complete disappearance of the father from the child's life in the post-divorce period (Arendell, 1992). More than one third of fathers in America do not see their children or support them economically (Erera & Baum, 2009). Despite the fact that conservative rhetoric considers "fathering as an achieved status rather than a particular complex of interactional processes and dynamics" (Arendell, 1992, p. 569), many authors point out to the context-dependency of fathering practices (Ahrons, 2007; Arditti, Molloy, Spiers, & Johnson, 2018; Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Doherty et al., 1998; Furstenberg, 1988; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999). Doherty et al. (1998) explain this situation by bringing forth the concept of "the ecological sensitivity of fathering". According to the authors, society's expectations from mothers are much more rigid. "Father-child relations, on the other hand, are culturally defined as less dyadic and more multilateral, requiring a threshold of

support from inside the family and from the larger environment. Undermining from the mother or from a social institution or system may induce many fathers to retreat from responsible fathering unless their own individual level of commitment to fathering is quite strong” (Doherty et al., 1998, p. 287).

Underlining the interaction between the “environmental press”, i.e. the facilitating and impeding factors influencing the father’s engagement with his children, and the quality of the caregiver mediation – mostly the mother – Arditti et al. (2018) point out to the existence of four types of fathers: The disengaged father is absent from the life of his child; the sporadic father’s presence is unpredictable; the encouraged father is there for the child if the circumstances are favorable; and finally the engaged father is part of his child’s life no matter what. Shapiro and Lambert (1999) give an explanation about why father-child relationships in the post-divorce period might be so complicated: In case of married fathers, the frame of the cultural script defining the responsibilities of these fathers is very precise. However, when divorce occurs, the cultural script which was used as a reference point loses its significance. Since in contemporary times, fathers’ roles are no longer reduced to that of breadwinners, they need to improvise in order to become good fathers. In addition, while doing so, they will not have the support of their wives with whom they were in a “continuous internal dialogue” during the marriage (Guignard, 2014, p. 46). Similarly, Umberson and Williams (1993) claim that the absence of the mother orchestrating the father-child relationship might increase fathers’ stress levels. Arendell (1992) gives another explanation to fathers’ absence: The transformation from a full-time father to a visiting father provokes such an “emotional turmoil” that some fathers prefer to remain absent from the lives of their children. Overall, all the authors seem to be pointing out to a common phenomenon: Fatherhood is transient (Furstenberg, 1988).

It is also important to remember that divorced fathers, while trying to preserve their relationships with their children, simultaneously struggle for resolving personal and social identity issues, since they have lost roles that were very important for manhood. Thus, most fathers perceive divorce as a major failure

(Umberson & Williams, 1993). The authors underline how these fathers will have to adopt avoidance and repression strategies in order to move on. These “strategies include working harder, exercising more, ‘staying busy’, moving away from the ex-wife and children, starting over with a new wife and children, and drinking alcohol and taking drugs” (Umberson & Williams, 1993, p. 396).

Finally, Bohannon (cited in Kruk, 1991) talks of the six stations of divorce which all cause the emergence of negative feelings which the parties will have to cope with: The *emotional* divorce is due to the dissolution of the marriage, the *co-parental* divorce implies a rearrangement of the parenting responsibilities and roles, the *legal* divorce puts an official end to the divorce, the *economic* divorce leads to the reorganization of material resources, the *community* divorce points out to the changing of the social capital of the individuals in question, and the *psychic* divorce is the perception of self as an autonomous person who is now on his/her own. Kruk underlines how in the case of noncustodial fathers, there is also the necessity to deal with the loss of children and the parental role. In short, post-divorce fatherhood might constitute a very challenging rupture for some men who have to deal with multiple dimensions of divorce.

### **1.2.2. Predictors of Paternal Involvement in the Post-divorce Period**

Studies point out to the interrelated influence of various factors on paternal involvement. Although many authors (Cheadle, Amato, & King, 2010; Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009) underline that the length of elapsed time after the marital dissolution is the best predictor of father-child contact, there seems to be no consensus on the effect of many other variables: For instance, some authors emphasize the negative effects of divorce when children are very young (Cheadle et al., 2010), others however claim that age is irrelevant (Tepp, 1983, Umberson & Williams, 1993). The same uncertainty exists in relation to the sex of the child (Cheadle et al., 2010; Tepp, 1983). Some studies claim that boys are more effected than girls. However, Emery (1982) indicates that boys may be reacting by adopting externalizing behavior, while girls’ problems are expressed through internalizing

behavior due to societal expectations about gender. The influence of geographical distance on father-child contact following divorce is also unknown although some studies show that fathers who live far away from their children see them less often (Cheadle et al., 2010, Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009). The problem is that it is not easy to understand the causal direction of the relationship. It might be that already disengaged fathers move far away from the children, or that physical distance paves the way to a loosening of the father-child contact.

One of the most influential predictors of paternal involvement is the influence of the mother on the father-child relationship (Arditti et al., 2018; Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Hamer, 1998; Kruk, 1992; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994). When parents actively engage with each other and share childrearing responsibilities, practices of co-parenting increase, and when they are in a conflictual relationship, the contact decreases (Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009). Arendell (1992) underlines how between the mother and the father, there might be a rivalry about who has the power and control when children are at stake. In a similar vein, Arditti et al. (2018) indicate how the mother can either be a mediator facilitating the father-child relationship or a gatekeeper who inhibits it. Hamer (1998) claims that there are three types of post-divorce couple relationships: In case of “*friendly relationships*”, the couple has a civilized relationship and act in the best interests of the child. The second category is that of “*intimate relationships*”. In this case, apart from the father-child relationship, there is an ongoing romantic relationship between the partners. The evolution of the couple relationship influences, either positively or negatively, the father-child relationship. Finally, there are “*antagonistic relationships*” which seem to be the most detrimental to the child since interparental conflict has major negative effects on the well-being of children (Emery, 1982). According to Afifi, McManus, Hutchinson and Baker (2007), in antagonistic relationships, parents transgress the boundaries separating the marital and parental dyads consciously or unconsciously, and make inappropriate disclosures to children about each other, in order to deal with feelings of losing control. This, in turn, negatively affects the children’s perceptions about their parents. In case of intense conflict, parents have

no insight about the damage they are doing to their children. The most extreme case seems to be when one parent influences the child to such a degree that ‘the parental alienation syndrome’, i.e. “a disturbance in which children are obsessed with deprecation and criticism of a parent — denigration that is unjustified and/or exaggerated” occurs (Gardner, 1985, p. 1).

The socioeconomic status of the father is another consistent predictor of paternal involvement since educated fathers who have higher wages tend to remain in contact with their children in the post-divorce period (Seltzer, 1991; Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009). According to Cheadle et al. (2010), “irrespective of family structure, well-educated parents, compared with poorly educated parents, may be more likely to accept new social norms about the importance of father involvement in children’s lives” (Cheadle et al., 2010, p. 207). In addition, when fathers have financial difficulties, contact with children can be considered as a cost (Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Cheadle et al., 2010; Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009). Erera and Baum (2009) claim that when fathers do not have the economic means to take over the required responsibilities in the post-divorce period, the dominant feeling is powerlessness. They also underline how following divorce these men have to deal with narcissistic injuries. Research emphasizes the parallelism between the investment of time and money, and “that children generally benefit from both aspects of father involvement, or neither” (Juby, Billette, Laplante, & Le Bourdais, 2007, p. 1221). Likewise, Seltzer (1991) claims that the three components of paternal involvement following divorce are interrelated: When fathers pay child support, they are more likely to visit their children and participate in the childrearing decisions.

Social support is another factor that facilitates the father-child relationship (Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Furstenberg, 1988). Castillo and Sarver (2012) underline the importance of family and friends in the provision of material, instrumental and emotional help. Consequently, with social support, fathers’ stress levels are reduced, their motivation as parents increase, and the mother-father relationships are less conflictual. However, the authors draw attention to the fact that perceived



social support is found to be more useful by fathers since received support may provoke feelings of neediness. In addition, social support does not seem to be democratically distributed since gender, age, and socioeconomic status influence its availability: Women, young people and individuals with higher income are the ones who have the most social support. While the need for social support is obvious in many cases during divorce, Umberson and Williams (1993) talk of the possibility of “social ostracism” for some divorced men.

Several studies (Juby et al., 2007; Umberson & Williams, 1993) point out to the decrease of paternal involvement following the remarriage of the mother. “Some nonresident fathers may feel either that their role has been usurped by stepfathers or that their involvement is less necessary because their children have a new paternal role model in the household” (Cheadle et al., 2010, p. 208). Umberson and Williams (1993) underline how fathers might perceive the existence of this man as a threat to their fatherhood identity. As to the repartnering of fathers, Juby et al. (2007) give an optimum time interval: When fathers’ relationships start two years following divorce, the father-child relationship remains intact. Otherwise, it is negatively affected since a routine has not yet been established. Swiss and Le Bourdais (2009) affirm that when the father has another child in a new union, he is inclined to be less involved with the children of the previous marriage. Furstenberg (1988) calls this “child swapping”: Fathers canalise the affection they have for their biological children from the previous marriage to the children of the new wife, or to the new biological children that they have in the current marriage. Tepp (1983) underlines how fathers are inclined to deny the negative impact of a new union on the existing father-child relationship. According to the author, distortions in self-reports are always possible due to the vulnerability of the subject.

When one looks at the connection between the pre- and post-divorce father-child relationships, an “inverse relationship” is observable (Kruk, 1992, p. 85): Fathers who were very engaged with their children during marriage might go from one extreme to another, and become disengaged fathers due to the burden of negative feelings provoked by the transformation of this relationship. The author

who underlines the interaction of structural and psychological factors that pave the way to a more or less involved fatherhood in the post-divorce period talks of loss and bereavement in these cases: An object of attachment is 'lost', a role is 'lost' and an identity is 'lost'. Umberson and Williams (1993) add the loss of control. Similarly, Tepp (1983) points out to feelings of insufficiency, guilt and being left out experienced by fathers during tense father-child encounters. It is also not unusual "for fathers to feel that they have become unimportant in their children's lives" (Ahrons, 2007, p. 62). Joint custody which is "useful mainly for those who can cooperate and communicate well and who are equally capable regarding parenting capacity" (Gardner, 1985, p. 1) might attenuate these negative feelings. However, its practice is very rare in the context of Turkey.

In conclusion, although it is said that "men are less psychologically sensitive to strained relationships with children since the paternal role is not as essential for men when compared with the maternal role's centrality to women" (Shapiro & Lambert, 1999), there seems to be many sources of psychological strain for men following divorce (Umberson & Williams, 1993) that might complicate the post-divorce father-child relationships.

### **1.2.3. The Current Study**

This study aims to understand different aspects of the post-divorce fatherhood experience. It is believed that a broader and deeper understanding of challenges, support systems, strategies, i.e. experiences of divorced fathers in general, might enable the tailoring of concrete and effective interventions, and thus have major positive effects on all the parties involved in the post-divorce "family" picture. Research questions of the study are:

- 1) Is there a continuity between pre-divorce and post-divorce father-child relationships?
- 2) What are the main thoughts and feelings of the divorced fathers in relation to their children in the post-divorce period?

- 3) How do different actors and factors impede or facilitate the post-divorce father-child relationship?

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **METHOD**

#### **2.1. The Primary Investigator (PI)**

The primary investigator and the author of this thesis is a student in the child and adolescent track of the Clinical Psychology Department at Istanbul Bilgi University.

During her internship, she began to question why the involvement of fathers in the therapy processes of their children was such a challenge: Not only fathers abstained from contributing to the process by avoiding to attend the sessions, but also they were usually very skeptical about the process itself. Thus, in most of the cases, fathers preferred to remain invisible while mothers brought their children to the sessions. However, the effect of fathers on the well-being of their children was obvious and the fathers' absence retarded the resolution of the symptoms that had led to the seeking of professional help at the beginning. In case of divorce, things were getting more complicated.

Besides this professional interest, there is a personal dimension to the choice of the subject by the primary investigator since she is also the child of a couple who had decided to divorce many years ago, a child who has grown up with her mother.

#### **2.2. Participants**

The sample consists of twelve noncustodial, nonresidential and divorced fathers. Two of the cases are still in the court of appeal. The youngest father is thirty-four years old while the oldest is forty-eight. Mean age is forty-two. As to the ages of the children, the youngest one is four years old, the oldest is twelve, and mean age is seven. Eleven of the fathers have one child while only one father has two. Half of the fathers have daughters, and the other half have sons. Eleven of the fathers are at least university graduates, and one is a highschool graduate. All of the fathers have a stable and relatively high income. None of the fathers have remarried.

**Table 1. Demographic Information About the Participants**

Name	FATHER			MOTHER		CHILD	Marriage
	Age (years)	Education	Occupation	Education	Currently Working	Age (years)/ Gender	- Divorce Dates
Ekin	48	University graduate	Technology consultant	University graduate	Yes	9/Boy	2006-2017
Ali	42	University graduate	Business manager	University graduate	Yes	6/Girl	2010-2017
Özgür	39	University graduate	Musician	University graduate	Yes	5/Boy	2009-2015
Cem	36	University graduate	Senior manager	University graduate	No	7/Girl	2010-2018
Emre	48	Master's degree	Banker	University graduate	Yes	8/Boy	2002-2018
Tuna	34	University graduate	Lawyer	University graduate	No	4/Boy	2013-2017
Recep	47	Master's degree	Finance specialist	University graduate	Yes	8/Girl	2006-2017
Kemal	44	University graduate	Engineer	Ph.D.	Yes	11/Boy	2001-2018
Bilge	38	Master's degree	Sales marketer	Master's degree	Yes	6/Girl	2007-2017
Mert	40	Master's degree	Engineer	University graduate	Yes	6/Girl	2010-2016
Alp	40	Highschool graduate	Voluntarily not working	University graduate	No	7/Girl	2011-2018
Yavuz	44	Master's degree	Investment consultant	University graduate	Yes	7&11/Boys	2007-2014

### **2.3. Procedure**

Convenience sampling was used in this research. Upon approval by the Ethics Committee at the Istanbul Bilgi University, twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the fathers. The interviews were preceded by a demographic form which was filled by the fathers. They also signed a consent form. The participants chose a convenient place – offices, houses and cafes – where the interviews were conducted. The interviews lasted one to two hours. Two of the interviews had to be prolonged and conducted in two sessions. All interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed. For the purpose of confidentiality, the real names of the fathers, as well as the mothers and children were replaced by pseudonyms chosen mostly by the fathers themselves.

### **2.4. Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used in order to analyze the data: “The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes, i.e. patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. This is much more than simply summarising the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of it” (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3353). The transcriptions of the interviews and the field notes were read several times. The interviews were then coded and as codes formed clusters, themes and the subthemes emerged. In order to ensure the interrater reliability, the themes, the subthemes and the codes were shared and discussed with triangulated investigators. Member checking was also used and the themes and the subthemes which emerged as a consensus were shared with the participants.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESULTS

Thematic analysis of the interviews with the fathers revealed the existence of three major themes: “*Becoming a Father*”, “*Divorce as a Process*” and “*Reorganization of Father-Child Relationships in the Post-divorce Period*”.

The first theme “*Becoming a Father*” is divided into two subthemes: “*Backstage of the Transition to Fatherhood*” and “*Evolution of Father-Child Relationships During Marriage*”. In the first subtheme “*Backstage of the Transition to Fatherhood*”, fathers’ willingness to become a father, hardships during pre- and post-delivery, negative life events destabilizing the already vulnerable equilibrium and transformation of the couple relationship during the transition period were explored. In the second subtheme “*Evolution of Father-Child Relationships During Marriage*”, dynamics of the father-child bonding, extent of the paternal contribution to childcare during marriage, fathers’ feelings of being shut out due to the impact of multiple external factors, nature of the father-child interactions, and self-evaluation of the fathers were discussed.

The second theme “*Divorce as a Process*” is divided into four subthemes. In the first subtheme “*Children as the Litmus Paper of the Marriage*”, children’s impact on the marriage was taken into consideration. In the second subtheme “*Making Decisions Based on the ‘Sake of the Children’*”, the relationship between the presence of children and the decision to divorce was discussed. In the third subtheme “*Paternal Anxiety Related to the Child During Divorce*”, multiple sources of anxiety in relation to the children in the post-divorce period were evaluated. In the final subtheme “*The Legal Process*”, different experiences of fathers during the judicial process and the determination of the framework of post-divorce father-child relationships depending on the amount of interparental conflict were addressed.

The third theme “*Reorganization of the Father-Child Relationships in the Post-divorce Period*” comprises three subthemes. In the first subtheme

“Experiences of Children from the Fathers’ Perspective”, feelings, thoughts, and reactions of children were elaborated from the fathers’ point of view. In the second subtheme “Making Sense of Post-Divorce Fatherhood: Fathers’ Experiences”, fathers’ post-divorce experiences as well as their feelings and thoughts were discussed. In the final subtheme “Different Dimensions of the Post-divorce Father-Child Relationship”, the sophisticated dynamics of the post-divorce father-child relationships were addressed.

### **3.1. Becoming a Father**

#### **3.1.1. Backstage of the Transition to Fatherhood**

##### **3.1.1.1. Willingness to Become a Father**

Fathers’ attitudes related to the idea of the baby were divergent. There were mainly four categories of fathers. The first category was comprised of fathers who were extremely willing to become a father. *Yavuz* and *Recep* for instance had to struggle in order to convince their wives who were reluctant about the idea of motherhood. Below are the words of *Yavuz*:

I always wanted to become a father. I convinced my wife to have a child. So, I was very fond of my children right from the beginning. I held my son before his mother did. It’s an incredible feeling. It is the most precious, the most beautiful thing we can leave on this earth. Thus, for me, being a father is one of the most beautiful experiences on earth (*Yavuz*).

The second category of fathers considered the baby as a must, but had planned to have the baby at a specific phase of the marriage once things were settled down. For these fathers, the baby was a natural outcome of a well bound marriage. In addition, they thought that they were materially and emotionally prepared to become a father. The third category of fathers adopted a more passive stance, but adapted to the new circumstances rapidly once they learned about the pregnancy. Finally, the fourth category of fathers were clearly resistant to the idea of having a baby: *Tuna* thought that the timing was wrong since the couple had just married, and *Emre* did not want a lifelong commitment with his wife.



It was obvious that this would lead to radical changes in my life. But back then, I couldn't prevent it. I should've prevented it, told my wife that I didn't want this, and moved my life into a totally different direction. But I didn't. This had serious costs in my life. Having a child in that marriage was a thing I had to escape from since we were so different from each other (*Emre*).

Regardless of the initial reactions, some fathers' feelings went through a great deal of fluctuation during the different phases of pregnancy. *Özgür* dreamed about having a peaceful family life following child birth although he claims that the relationship had already become routine due its very long history. Accepting the fact that the marriage was not on track before the decision to have a child, *Recep* whose wife was fervently refusing to have a baby (during their flirting phase, she had gone through an abortion) was expecting that the birth of the baby would become a catalyst for the marriage. *Bilge* recalled how he had regretted his wife's pregnancy following a major fight with her in the first trimester. *Ekin* and *Cem*'s troublesome memories of the past about father-son conflicts had been revived. Their clear preference for a baby girl was related to the anxiety about their own childhood. Several fathers underlined the extreme pressure put on fathers because of additional responsibilities. *Cem* likened the arrival of a child into the household to a bomb and continued:

But inside, there is also a part of you that wants to get away from this responsibility. People fall into pieces under such a burden. This is especially true in the first period... This is a very deep transformation process and thus I believe that there are depressive dimensions as well (*Cem*).

Despite the differences in the degree of willingness, all the fathers had supported their wives, in one way or another. They had accompanied their spouses to doctors' appointments, had gathered information about being a good father, and had participated in trainings about effective parenting.

### **3.1.1.2. Hardships During Pre- and Post-delivery**

The vast majority of the fathers described a stressful pregnancy period either for physical or emotional reasons. Many couples had to deal with complications related to the pregnancy period itself: *Özgür* mentioned his wife's high blood

pressure and nausea during pregnancy; *Mert* and *Ali*'s wives had to stay home and lie down for months due to unexpected bleeding which required a lot of tests; *Cem*'s wife had gestational diabetes; *Tuna*'s wife had a lot of anxiety due to a previous miscarriage; and *Alp*'s wife had to struggle with brain embolism.

Problems persisted following the birth of the baby in some of the cases: Premature birth of *Cem*'s baby with insufficient pulmonary capacity caused a great uncertainty related to the survival of the baby in the first days after birth. Stressing the weight he lost due to stress, *Ali* emphasized how it was difficult for him to balance his paternal and professional responsibilities during his daughter's infancy since she had a lot of medical problems. The father described this period as "one of the most difficult times of my life".

### **3.1.1.3. Negative Life Events Destabilizing the Already Vulnerable Equilibrium**

Five of the fathers accounted unsettling life events that occurred during and right after the pregnancy period. *Bilge*'s wife broke his leg during pregnancy and had to stay still for months, and his mother who had bipolar disorder had a very severe depressive attack which caused tension between the couple. During that period, he felt betrayed by his wife who could not empathize with him, although he believed that he had done his best during her recovery process. *Mert* had to take care of his father who was confined to bed – he deceased during this period - and this seemed to bother his pregnant wife who felt neglected at that time. In addition, he had suddenly lost his job and was trying hard in order to succeed at an international exam. *Tuna* stressed how he did not want to remember the amplification of the already existing tension between his mother and his former wife during the time of pregnancy; *Yavuz*, although rationalizing the reaction of his wife by the effects of the postpartum period, accounted how his mother was chased out of the house by his wife right after birth; *Cem*'s father who also had bipolar disorder committed suicide while his wife was pregnant and he had to deal with feelings of emptiness while still trying to be resilient in order to support his wife:

My father committed suicide when my wife was six months pregnant. Thus, it was a bad time. I felt like in a void. I couldn't live the sorrow since I had to be strong during that period. My wife was pregnant, I had to support her. She was about to quit her job in a month. I had to provide money for the household. I didn't have the luxury to fall down. It was rather an era of survival for me (*Cem*).

Although many fathers underlined their efforts of supporting their wives as much as possible during the hardships of the transition to motherhood – *Tuna* for instance repeatedly said “our pregnancy” – the introduction of the negative life events into the couple's life seemed to have set a new boundary between the couple since their effects were intensified by the pregnancy-related sensitivity of both partners.

#### **3.1.1.4. Transformation of the Couple Relationship**

Although some men emphasized that the couple relationship had already degraded prior to the birth of the child, many fathers underlined how the nature of the couple relationship had changed following birth. Interestingly, this change was always negative. However, it must be kept in mind that the narratives were constructed retrospectively, and were probably influenced by the bitter ending. Fathers might have given different responses had this interview been done right after the birth of their babies.

Many stressed how the interest of the mother became solely focused on the child following birth. In these cases, although accepting this fact as a natural outcome of birth due to the pressing needs of a newborn child, and appreciating the efforts of the mothers who were constantly breastfeeding the babies in an exhausted manner, it was possible to sense a latent resentment in the discourses of several fathers. The target was usually the partner in the fathers' narratives. When questioned directly about how this change made them feel about their children, fathers emphasized that they had no negative feelings towards them. However, fathers were more comfortable in expressing negative feelings when questions were asked about the possibility of having another child. Then, the direct negative impact of child birth became evident. This was probably due to the fact that expressing

fear, anxiety and anger against an unborn child was considered as more socially acceptable by these fathers.

After some time, marriage with a child became very boring for me. I could not make sense of the institution. I was asking myself what have we done, what is this? I love my daughter, our communication is very good but I no longer have a communication with my wife. It vanished all of a sudden (*Bilge*).

Sexuality was one of the mainly affected domains of couple life. It was as if the father had been replaced by the child. Looking retrospectively to the past, two fathers claimed that their betrayal stories were the end products of the preceding relationship dynamics following the birth of the child. Thus, they seemed to avoid the responsibility of the extramarital relationship:

As to myself, I became a total outsider [dış kapının mandalı]. Following the birth of the children we were in a brother-sister [abi kardeş] mood (*Yavuz*).

Another negative effect of the child on the couple's relationship mentioned by the fathers was the surfacing of the latent conflicts between the parents during discussions related to childrearing practices. *Ekin* for instance claimed that the mother of his child was a "helicopter mom" who "tried to program every minute of the child" while he was a more relaxed parent. Similarly, Ali underlined how he did not approve the sleeping together of his daughter with her mother.

### **3.1.2. Evolution of Father-Child Relationships During Marriage**

#### **3.1.2.1. Bonding with the Child**

The first sight of the child was a weird moment for many fathers. Although they used very positive words in order to express their feelings, many pointed out to an inability to name what one was feeling. *Özgür* for instance, while talking about the baby, fondly called him "a creature": The infant was a part of him, but also a stranger who would be discovered. *Bilge* underlined that the dominant feeling following birth was curiosity: "I wasn't very emotional back then. I didn't burst into tears. It was rather curiosity."

Fathers' accounts pointed out to a striking variation in the timing of the formation of the father-child bond. Half of them clearly underlined that the father-child attachment was immediately formed. *Emre* who was one of the most reluctant fathers belonged to this category since he talked of "love at first sight". *Kemal* mentioned how he had cried when he first saw the baby, and underlined how crying was not an act he was used to. For others, it took a little bit longer: Some fathers were dealing with life stressors, others were working too hard and consequently, had a very limited time with their children. *Ali*, for instance, had to take some time off his job in order to form a healthy father-child bond with his daughter. *Bilge* pointed out to a difference of mother-child and father-child bonds and emphasized the importance of communication in the latter. *Ekin* even verbalized an unconscious fear which may be haunting the minds of many fathers: Fathers could never be sure that they were the real biological fathers of the children. Thus, he underlined how he felt pride and relief when he had realized that the child looked very much like him.

Relationship between the sex of the child and bonding was mentioned by some fathers. Three fathers wanted their babies to be boys since they thought that communication - and bonding - with a boy would be easier due to the existence of shared interests and activities. However, some of the fathers were thinking just the opposite: They thought that father-daughter bonding was much stronger when compared to sons.

Finally, although the fathers' bonding processes were idiosyncratic, all the fathers seemed to acknowledge the crucial importance of the father-child bond. Thus, they did their best in order to strengthen this bond during the marriage.

### **3.1.2.2. Paternal Contribution to Childcare**

Contributing to the care of the baby seemed to be a major catalyzer of the father-child bond. Half of the fathers claimed that their contribution to childcare had been major. Those who admitted that their contribution in the first months was modest set forth different excuses. Three fathers (*Alp*, *Ali* and *Cem*) stressed the

length of the working days as an impeding factor to paternal contribution. However, they underlined how they had done their best while they were at home. *Bilge* and *Özgür* pointed out to the limits of paternal contribution to childcare in the first months since the baby vehemently needed the mother during that period. *Ekin* emphasized how his ex-wife had tried to be both a mother and father, taking over the full responsibility of the child, and leaving no space for his contribution. *Tuna* and *Mert*'s chances of contributing to childcare had been minimal since mothers had taken the initiative and made a spatial arrangement that mainly left the fathers out of the picture: *Tuna* accounted how in the weekdays his wife and child were staying at the parents' house of the mother. Thus, he underlined how awkward he had felt as the boundary separating the nuclear family and the outside world became permeable, and how the father-child bond could not develop properly during that time. *Mert*'s case seemed to be the most extreme: Following the premature birth of the baby, his wife had decided that the European side of the city's weather was not appropriate for the infant, and had moved into her mother's house at the Asian side. Interestingly, the narratives of many fathers pointed out to a kind of victimization. According to the fathers, most of the time, it was the impact of external factors that created an obstacle to the father-child bond. The degree of their own contributions to this dynamic was likely disregarded by some of the fathers.

### **3.1.2.3. Fathers' Feelings of Being Shut Out**

While *Tuna* and *Mert* were physically separated from their children, in many other cases, such physical separation was not in question. Still, fathers had to deal with feelings of being shut out, devaluation and worthlessness: According to the fathers, the mother and the mother-in-law dyads were so dominant in these examples that they had felt almost powerless. In four of these cases, the mother-in-law had moved in temporarily with the couple in order to alleviate the burden of childcare. There were various accounts of fathers interpreting the omnipotent attitude of the mother and the presence of the mother-in-law as an intrusion blocking the way of a healthy father-child bonding.

Several fathers underlined how their wives had become very critical following birth. While some of the fathers tried to empathize with their wives taking into consideration the effects of the postpartum period, they also seemed to be resentful since they felt that their parenting capacities had been undermined. *Ali*'s case indicated well how stressful this period could be for all the parties involved: *Ali* had decided to remain unemployed for a certain period of time in order to form a stronger father-child bond with his daughter since his working schedule was very tight. His mother-in-law had also quit her successful career in order to take care of the baby and had moved in with the couple, even though temporarily. In addition, the couple had changed twenty-four babysitters in a row. *Ali* underlined how he had felt trapped during that period:

When I was saying something, it was followed by a defense. 'How are you going to take care of her? How are you going to prepare her breakfast in the morning? How will you deal with the babysitter?' Think about it, there is a man who is not working, he has almost become a housewife, he is about to put on an apron and cook, and there is a grandmother watching over him (*Ali*).

Consequently, *Ali* claimed that he had become aware of the fact that a father had less say in the upbringing of a child when compared to the mother. This was a major disappointment for him, and had provoked feelings of distancing and alienation.

#### **3.1.2.4. Father-Child Interactions**

Age of the child when parents had decided to divorce seemed to be an important factor in defining the nature of father-child interactions. Several fathers stressed how there was not much to do when the child was too young. Consequently, when asked about father-child activities, fathers who divorced when children were very young could only mention basic play activities, and their contribution to childcare, i.e. changing diapers, feeding, and putting the baby to sleep. As the child grew, the shared activities diversified. Thus, the content of shared time was very different and more sophisticated in the case of fathers who had divorced when the child was older.

While the majority of the fathers seemed to be involved in recreational activities with their children, some fathers' accounts pointed out to the prominence of the responsibility component of the paternal involvement construct. These fathers took over a great deal of responsibilities related to children since, according to their accounts, they were trying to fill in the emotional gap left by their wives. Latent anger seemed to be present in these discourses. *Recep* who had quit his job and started working in a different setting in order to take care of his daughter who was having difficulties staying with a babysitter considered himself as the primary caregiver of the child. In the following excerpt, he expressed how he had tried to make sense of his wife's "indifferent attitude" towards their daughter:

She didn't want to have a child even when we were married. I don't know why. Maybe it's because of her profession. She is always with children. She is a primary school teacher. So maybe it's because of her job that she hates kids (*Recep*).

### **3.1.2.5. Self-evaluation as a Father**

"Doing one's best" under the existing circumstances was repeated several times during the interviews. Even though some fathers believed that they could improve the quality of their father-child bond, the majority of the fathers were satisfied with their fatherhood performances during marriage.

The criterion of comparison was often the fathering performances of other fathers, and especially the bad ones. These fathers were described as men who were reluctant to share responsibilities related to childcare due their adherence to a more traditional division of labor, matching domestic and childcare duties with women, and professional responsibilities with men.

Fathers' own fathers were also crucial points of reference. In the case of fathers who were satisfied with their fathers' parenting performance, they were taking them as role models; otherwise, they struggled in order to avoid repeating their fathers' erroneous approaches. Based on the descriptions of the fathers of their relationships with their own fathers, it is possible to observe that there were three main categories: The first category was composed of six fathers who defined their



relationships with their own fathers using rather positive adjectives. At this point, it must be stressed that two amongst them underlined a good but somewhat distant father-child relationship. In the negative father-child relationship category, there were two fathers: Bilge and Kemal. They perceived their fathers as quite insufficient. Finally, in the ambivalent relationships category, there were four fathers. These fathers were considered as good parents in some aspects, and bad ones in others. Below are the words of *Yavuz* who found some aspects of his relationship with his father problematic, and *Emre* who seemed to appreciate his father's efforts very much:

I had an unfulfilled desire according to which I was going to do everything I could not do with my father (*Yavuz*).

My father was a great father. He was a loving and self-sacrificing father. I am struggling to give to my son at least as much as I got from him. That's fatherhood for me (*Emre*).

Finally, feedback from the outside world, and sometimes from the wife, were also critical in confirming that the fathers were on the right track. Consequently, fathers were able to preserve a positive self-image in the face of multiple narcissistic injuries. Interestingly, Tuna who had underlined the mistrust of his ex-wife since she never left the father-child dyad alone made the following statement:

My ex-wife always told this as well. I did my best. I fed him, I changed his diapers. My friends were laughing at me. I was changing the diapers and coming back. They were videotaping me and talking about my competence as a man: 'He changed the diapers in ten seconds' (*Tuna*).

## **3.2. Divorce as a Process**

### **3.2.1. Children as the Litmus Paper of the Marriage**

The child's influence on marriage seemed to be complicated. Many fathers' stories of the divorce related in one way or another to child birth. This did not imply that the children had caused the divorce. However, combined with the effects of various life stressors, the period of pregnancy, and the first years following birth,

i.e. the difficulties related to the transition to parenthood, seemed to have subjected the resilience of the couple's relationship to a series of tests. Consequently, ten fathers out of twelve pointed out to a downward course of their marriage following the birth of their child.

### **3.2.2. Making Decisions Based on the “Sake of the Children”**

The majority of the fathers underlined how they calculated the pros and cons of staying married, taking into account the psychological well-being of the children. Thus, they – and the mothers – tried hard to continue the marriage for the sake of the children for some time. Several fathers mentioned how they went to a couple therapist. In the end, the final decision of divorce was also made for the sake of the children since the disadvantages of remaining married outweighed the advantages.

I felt that if we didn't divorce, it would be worse for Mert. It was the existence of Mert that led to the postponing of the decision of divorce. But things were getting worse and worse. The dose of the fights was escalating. My anger was increasing. I became a furious person and I became blind in those moments of anger. We were reciprocally hurting each other and Mert was a witness (*Kemal*).

Looking at the fathers' stories, it is possible to say that seven of the fathers initiated the divorce. In three of the cases, women wanted to end the relationship, and finally, two couples had a consensus about the separation.

### **3.2.3. Paternal Anxiety Related to the Child During Divorce**

#### **3.2.3.1. Physical Distance**

The most common source of anxiety seemed to be the unknown effects of divorce on the future father-child relationship. Physical distance gained a symbolic meaning in this context. Longing was the most dominant feeling expressed by these fathers.

Physical distance and emotional distance were interrelated in the minds of some fathers:

I am making such a decision but I will be separating from Ezgi. I will be separating physically, but also spiritually. I will be learning to live somewhere else without her (*Ali*).

Physical distance could mean the possibility of losing the love of the child if a strong father-child relationship had already been established prior to divorce, or the inability to create an emotional bond with the child if the child was very young at the time of divorce. Below are the words of *Alp* who mentioned with pride how he had included his daughter in all his activities during the marriage, and those of *Tuna* whose son could still be considered as an infant while the parents were divorcing:

If she doesn't always see me, will she start to like me less? This was a concern at the beginning (*Alp*).

I often thought and felt that I wouldn't be able to form a bond with him (*Tuna*).

Physical distance also implied the possibility of losing control over the children. Many fathers, and especially those who live in a different city, expressed fear about remaining outside of the lives of the children. It was as if the children could drift away if these fathers did not pay extra attention to stay in contact.

Fathers dealt with this anxiety through the adoption of different strategies: First, several fathers chose to live nearby the old family house. *Yavuz* bought a motorcycle in order to reach his children rapidly in case of need, and *Kemal* tried to see his son every day despite multiple responsibilities in other domains of life. Technology (phone calls, Skype, FaceTime) was also used by many fathers in order to bypass the obstacles caused by physical distance.

### **3.2.3.2. Conflictual Relationships with the Gatekeeper Mothers**

The couple relationship was tense right after divorce in some of the cases. Fathers were especially anxious when an accusation of betrayal had paved the way to the divorce. Parental alienation syndrome, i.e. the child being influenced by the mother's discrediting comments about the father, was a major concern:

Since the mother did not want to divorce, she projected everything to Mert. ‘You are abandoning your child, your father is leaving you.’ She always repeated these things and blamed me in front of the child and this was very hard for me. I struggled a lot in order to balance the situation (*Kemal*).

As the custodial parent, the mothers would be much more present in the lives of the children, and the fathers would have far less opportunities to present their side of the stories. In this respect, fathers who currently had problems with their wives, and indirectly and latently with their children, were hopeful about the future. They believed that as adolescents, instead of introjecting the mothers’ accounts, their children would approach the issue with a more critical and objective mind.

Some fathers had a deep concern about not seeing their child again. *Özgür* who now has a very friendly relationship with his ex-wife was one of those fathers.

When she was really angry after that incident [the extramarital relationship], she told me that I would never see Umut again. This was implanted in my mind. I know that such a thing won’t happen but even the uttering of such a sentence was really disturbing (*Özgür*).

*Recep*’s wife had taken the child and left him. Back then, the father could not see his daughter for a month. In addition, he was not informed about the location of their new house or her daughter’s new school since the mother had asked for a restraining order against the father. As to the text messages sent to the ex-wife, they were only sporadically answered:

After my wife left home, I remembered the phone call made four days earlier. The man who had called had told me that my wife would not show the child to me. I started thinking... How could this be, how am I not going to see my child? Then I read some articles on the internet. There, it was written that there were cases in which mothers were punishing fathers by preventing them from seeing their children (*Recep*).

The ex-wives’ side of the stories, i.e. their feelings and thoughts, remained unknown due to the restriction of the sample to fathers. In other words, it is impossible to deeply understand the motivations of the ex-wives, presented through the lenses of the fathers who were experiencing many negative feelings. Given the

opportunity to express themselves, the ex-wives would also probably rationalize their behaviors by bringing forth multiple arguments.

### **3.2.3.3. Reactions of the Children to Divorce**

Another subject of concern that was constantly repeated was the uncertainty about the child's short- and long-term reactions to divorce. Many fathers emphasized the importance of the age of the child: While *Cem* and *Mert* were relieved that their children were very young (*Cem*'s daughter was 3 years old while *Mert*'s daughter was one year old), *Emre* and *Ekin* thought that they had separated at a very fragile age (*Emre*'s son was six years old, and *Ekin*'s son was eight years old), and were worried about the negative effects this could have on the well-being of their children. Thus, many couples had recourse to child psychologists during this period, and followed their instructions. Consequently, many couples managed to act as a team despite their ongoing personal conflicts as a couple.

### **3.2.3.4. Potential Partners of the Ex-Wives Following Divorce**

Several fathers mentioned their concerns related to potential partners of their ex-wives. The new unions of the mothers seemed to be a vulnerable subject: On one hand, fathers were worried about the influence of these new "father figures" on their children, on the other, the existence of these "rivals" seemed to trigger ambiguous feelings due to the unresolved issues related to the couple relationship. *Yavuz* genuinely confessed how he has remorse about the ending of the couple relationship following the discovery of his extramarital relationship by his wife. Thus, it seemed like anxieties related to the children were being mixed up with personal feelings of the fathers. Only *Özgür* and *Ekin* knew that their ex-wives had new partners. Having moved to another city since he did not want to witness the new life of his wife, *Ekin* emphasized his disapproval of the new partner who constituted a bad role model to the child:

You move out of the house, in 2-3 days another man comes in. You have always told your child about tattoos, the psychological effects of those tattoos, the profile of people who get them, and the possibility of wanting to have them removed in the future. Then suddenly a man whose body is covered with tattoos enters the house and your child comes and asks you on which part of his body he should get the tattoo and wants to look at the tattoo models. At that moment, you understand how your worries have a real basis (*Ekin*).

#### **3.2.4. The Legal Process**

The defining factor of the harshness of the judicial process seemed to be the nature of the relationship between the couple. Although loaded with tension during the hearings in some cases, many couples had succeeded in reconciling in some sense for the sake of the child.

##### **3.2.4.1. Child Support**

All the fathers seemed to be aware of the fact that the child was the common responsibility of both parents. Thus, according to the self-reports, all the fathers were fulfilling their material obligations towards their children and ex-wives. Almost all the fathers payed the educational costs of the child. At this point, the quality of the interparental relationship in the post-divorce period came into the forefront since several fathers underlined how it was important to trust the ex-wife: These fathers were sure that the child support they were giving would be strictly used for the needs of the child. Finally, it seemed indispensable to stress that the socioeconomic situation of the fathers was a great moderator in this respect: These fathers were able to support their children economically.

##### **3.2.4.2. Best Interests of the Child**

The majority of the fathers underlined how they had pushed their personal issues and interests into the background for the sake of the children during the trials. Thus, *Tuna* who had been cheated by his wife never communicated this piece of information to anybody. *Yavuz* who had an extramarital relationship which was discovered by his wife, and who confesses that he had no other option than signing

every piece of paper given by his wife - since she had concrete evidence - claims that he has done everything for the sake of his children.

Appreciating the need of a young child for his/her mother, ten of the fathers stressed how they did not want the custody of children. *Emre* wanted joint custody but his demand was refused by the court. Finally, *Recep*'s case was the most conflictual one since it was still in the court of appeal, and the father wanted fervently the custody of his child, claiming that the child would be academically and emotionally better off with him.

#### **3.2.4.3. The Degree of Conflict**

The stories of the fathers pointed out to the existence of a continuum comprising a vast diversity of experiences: On one end, there was *Alp* who considered divorce as a banal phenomenon. However, his narrative was always too optimistic. Thus, at some point I had to ask him why as a couple, they had decided to divorce if everything was so perfect. On the other end, there were the fathers who had suffered for a considerable amount of time. *Mert* could only see his daughter under the supervision of his wife who was suspicious about the possibility of *Mert* kidnapping his daughter. When asked about the causes of this suspicion, the responsibility was attributed to the psychological state of the mother. *Recep* and *Cem*'s cases were still in the court of appeal. *Cem* underlined how he was still unable to establish an order in his life due to this condition.

Several fathers stressed how divorce lawyers were very aggressive and turned the couple against each other in order to maximize the gains of women. The fathers who had been through a contested divorce underlined how they had experienced a big disappointment during the judicial process since they had to deal with enormous material demands and fierce accusations of their wives. The divorce process was prolonged and very tiring according to the accounts of these fathers. This, in turn, had a very negative effect on children who were witnessing the conflictual relationship of their parents.

#### **3.2.4.4. Abiding or not by the Protocol**

A protocol determining the visitation days of the fathers was signed in all of the cases. However, eleven out of twelve fathers underlined that the protocol was symbolic, and that they could see their children whenever they wanted. While some fathers were already getting along well with their ex-wives, others who had conflictual relationships could separate personal issues from the issues related to the child. Thus, the parents had agreed upon the fact that father presence was essential for the well-being of the child. The only exception was *Recep*. In parallel to *Mert*, *Recep* also mentioned the previous psychological problems of his ex-wife which he had discovered following marriage. Below is his portrayal of the atmosphere of the visitation days:

Once there was the Berlin Wall. In Germany, one side was governed by communism, and the other by capitalism. There was the war prisoner exchange. (...) Every week, our exchange takes place in a similar way. With an official report, we exchange the child (*Recep*).

The connection between the nature of the couple relationship following divorce and the satisfaction of the fathers in relation to post-divorce father-child relationships pointed out once again to the prominence of the mother's gatekeeper role. Fathers could have unlimited access to their children and were able to preserve more easily the quality of the father-child relationship when they were on good terms with the mothers.

### **3.3. Reorganization of the Father-Child Relationship in the Post-Divorce Period**

#### **3.3.1. Experiences of Children from the Fathers' Perspective**

##### **3.3.1.1. Children Who Try to Make Sense of the New Family Dynamics**

Many fathers emphasized how it was and is still difficult for their child to make sense of the decision of separation, especially when there seemed to be no major conflict between the parents. Some fathers' anecdotes illustrated how the introduction of new partners into the parents' lives revived a harsh interrogation



process. Consequently, fathers had to deal with challenging questions and comments coming from the children. Özgür openly expresses his anger and disappointment. As to Ekin for whom the theme of rivalry is repeatedly coming into the forefront - the conflicts between his father and himself during his childhood, his fear about having a son during the pregnancy of his wife due to a potential conflict in the future, the struggle to be the alpha amongst the peer group of his son – he seems to be dealing with his frustration and pain by using humor:

He said, “papa, you know I have two fathers but I love you more. I can’t explain to you what I felt at that moment” (*Özgür*).

Her mother is in a relationship now and he asks me “Are you going to continue being my father?” He is still trying to make sense of the relationships, of the concepts of motherhood and fatherhood (*Ekin*).

From the accounts of fathers, the need to talk to children, to give them age-appropriate explanations that will help them make sense of the situation, and to convince them that the ending of the couple relationship has nothing to do with them (children might be prone to self-recrimination) becomes obvious. Child psychologists’ crucial role comes into the forefront at this point. Almost all the fathers underlined how they had asked for professional help in order to find the healthiest way of approaching their children.

### **3.3.1.2. Children’s Reactions When Divorce Occurs Very Early**

Fathers who had divorced when the children were very young believed that children were not influenced by the parental separation at the time of divorce since they did not understand anything. *Özgür* and *Cem* underlined that their children had not witnessed any conflict between the couple. Thus, *Özgür* thought that the child had never felt any tension, and *Cem* believed that due to his young age, the divorced family model had become the norm of the child. *Mert* preferred to delegate the communication of these subjects with the child to the mother and was unsure about the knowledge of the child about divorce. *Tuna* who seemed to be one of the most anxious fathers during divorce, and who is now very attentive to the reactions of

his child underlined how in the past, his son was unaware of what was going on due to his young age, and how he had started asking questions as he was growing up.

### **3.3.1.3. Psychosomatic Symptoms**

Two of the fathers talked about psychosomatic symptoms of the children. During the separation phase, the children had seriously regressed. *Ali's* daughter had started urinating in the middle of the living room, and had refused to go to kindergarten by constantly crying. *Yavuz* also underlined how they did not understand the negative impact of divorce on their younger son until the symptoms appeared:

He was a rapidly developing boy since he was copying his older brother. His development stopped all of a sudden. He started not to tell when he wanted to go to the toilet, his speech regressed, he was having difficulties using the knife and fork. The father has left home... During a whole year, he went to kindergarten in tears (*Yavuz*).

### **3.3.1.4. Mature Reactions**

Two fathers expressed their surprise about the current mature reactions of their children. One of these children was six months old when the divorce occurred. In both of the cases, fathers claimed that the post-divorce couple relationship was very friendly. The fathers also underlined how the children had not witnessed any interparental conflict during the marriage.

### **3.3.1.5. Feelings of Relief**

Although children were upset about the marital dissolution, some felt relief since interparental discord during marriage was high. *Yavuz* believed that his younger son longed to be with him, but did not express this since he was also disturbed by the interparental conflict when the mother and father were in the same household:

When I drop them home, when he goes to bed, he constantly asks me when I will be leaving. I think that he means by this: 'Go so that nothing distressing happens' (*Yavuz*).

### **3.3.1.6. Inability to Understand the Real Feelings of the Child**

Three of the fathers claimed that they might not know the divorce-related feelings of their children. As already mentioned, *Mert* preferred not to talk about these issues with the child. Underlining how his daughter was a very social child, *Cem* thought that everything was fine. Finally, in the case of *Recep*'s daughter whose life had dramatically changed following divorce – change of home, change of school, and a very tense post-divorce couple relationship – the subject of divorce remained a taboo. The father had recourse to a child psychologist.

In some cases, it was very difficult to understand the genuine feelings of the children. *Bilge* understood that his daughter was deeply affected by the divorce two years after the phenomenon, during an ordinary visit to a shopping mall.

She said I miss my mother. That was happening from time to time. I said 'dear, I just picked you up, it hasn't been an hour'. She turned towards me and said 'everybody's mother and father are together. Wasn't it possible for you to wait until I grew a little older? I feel very bad, I have a lot of difficulties'. Of course at that moment she is stabbing me again and again. If she had said this with anger, it would be more easy. The child relived these repeatedly in her mind. She was asking from time to time: 'Why did you separate?' She was talking in a sweet way. That was the first time she made me feel how tiring and sad this was in her mind. She made me feel it in a very open way. I fell into pieces. I started crying like crazy in the middle of the shop. (...) It had been one and a half, two years and this was the first time we had talked about this subject with Nevra (*Bilge*).

### **3.3.1.7. Phantasies of Bringing the Parents Back Together**

The vast majority of the fathers underlined how they were aware that their children wanted the parents back together.

He was trying to reconcile us. During the meals, he held our hands and put them on top of each other (*Emre*).

At this point, maintaining family routines in order to ensure a smooth transition for the child became a controversial issue: While *Özgür*, who underlined that his son was aware of the fact that his parents were no longer together, continued the routines such as going on a vacation as "a family", *Ali* who was also staying in

his ex-wife's house from time to time or going on vacation together with his ex-wife and daughter intentionally decided to stop them since he thought that they were not sustainable in the long run. He also believed that they were confusing the child by creating an illusion of "we", and giving her an unrealistic hope about the future.

Overall, divorce provoked ambivalent feelings in children according to the narratives of the fathers: On one side, the disruption of the established order led to a grief process expressed in very different ways depending on the personal characteristics of the children and parents, as well as on the family dynamics, on the other side, some children were relieved by the cessation of the parental conflicts. Once again, experiences converged and diverged, and children were positioned on a continuum depending on their degree of grief or relief. However, despite these differences, fathers' accounts pointed out to the fact that all children preserved a certain hope about reuniting their parents some day in the future. Whether this hope existed as well in some of the fathers remains to be a question mark.

### **3.3.2. Making Sense of Post-divorce Fatherhood: Fathers' Experiences**

Divorce was a major transition not only for children, but also for parents. Fathers' accounts illustrated how divorce provoked ambivalent feelings, especially when children were at stake.

#### **3.3.2.1. Starting All Over Again**

In the majority of the cases, it was the father who had left the house. Thus, there were a lot of transitions in men's lives. That resettling and establishing a new order had not been easy was stressed by many fathers. Some were still struggling: Due to economical hardships, *Tuna* for instance had returned back to his parents' house. Occupying the position of the father, he had once again become the child of the family which caused a certain discomfort for the man.

#### **3.3.2.2. Being Single: Ambivalent Thoughts and Feelings**

The majority of the fathers underlined how the marriage was not sustainable, and divorce was inevitable. Thus, they seemed to be confident about the decision

of divorce. However, at the level of feelings, things got more complicated. Fathers had ambivalent thoughts about the ending of the couple relationship which meant simultaneously more freedom, but also more loneliness:

It was a different experience for me since there was always someone in the house when you came home. Suddenly there is no one, you are all alone. (...) First, the freedom felt good. But also there was a feeling of void (*Cem*).

The framework in which the fathers were moving no longer existed. Thus, they were faced with a multitude of possibilities when organizing their new life. This was both a source of joy and anxiety. Several fathers underlined how they were not fit for single life. Yavuz who had an extramarital relationship during his marriage was one of these fathers:

Since you have a family guy character you ask yourself what you are doing here. When we were in our twenties, we were going to Kemancı and seeing forty year old men. We were criticizing them. You remember those things and you start longing once again for a stable life (*Yavuz*).

Consequently, it was not surprising to see that currently seven of the fathers were in a committed relationship. The remaining fathers were single, but the great majority was open to a potential relationship. However, while three of the fathers clearly wanted to remarry, the rest was quite hesitant. Once again, if we consider the existence of an imaginary continuum, *Tuna* and *Bilge* were situated at the end comprising the most skeptical fathers. The two men seemed to have serious concerns about the probability of a lifelong commitment.

### **3.3.2.3. Sense of Failure as a Father**

The ambivalence that existed in the fathers' discourses in relation to the couple relationship disappeared when children were in question. A depressive tone existed in all of the discourses. Self-accusation, anger towards oneself, sadness were the dominant feelings of the fathers. Interestingly, many fathers considered the fact that they were divorced as a failure.

I always felt frustration. We failed at this. In a father's life there are several things. Failing professionally, failing in the family, and failing to orient the child to a proper direction... All three are reasons of suicide according to me (*Ali*).

It was possible to sense that most of the fathers were successful and ambitious in many domains of life. Thus, they experienced the divorce as a narcissistic injury. In turn, in several fathers' accounts, a grandiose tone putting all the blame on their ex-wives was striking. In a very split way, they described themselves as all good while the women were the flawed ones.

#### **3.3.2.4. Fathers' Efforts of Preserving a Positive Self-Image**

Fathers tried to rationalize divorce in order to prevent the emergence of negative feelings. Several fathers pointed out to the normalization of divorce in contemporary times. One of the fathers even emphasized how nowadays remaining married was the exception. Others mentioned the traumatizing divorce cases in the aftermath of which mothers and fathers envenomed their children against each other, and took pride in their own relatively peaceful post-divorce experiences. Again, some fathers stressed how remaining married would be more destructive for the child. In order to attenuate the harshness of the self-interrogations related to the child, fathers had to convince themselves as well about the inevitability of divorce:

There are times when I blame myself asking myself if things could be different... But this is only in theory since when I turn back and look, I become quite sure that I have done everything one can do. There was nothing else to do. I have done everything a husband, a father, a friend, and a lover could do (*Kemal*).

#### **3.3.2.5. Getting Support**

Many fathers were supported, both economically and emotionally, by their families during the divorce process. The most repeatedly mentioned source of support was the mothers of the fathers. However, it must be stressed that the fathers of these fathers had deceased. A few fathers underlined how they did not want their families to get involved since things would get out of control. Thus, *Alp* who seems to be always optimistic underlined how the divorce news was a surprise for his

mother and father who were unaware of what was going on in the couple's life. Interestingly, there were also some fathers who stressed the importance of the support of the ex-wife. Some fathers had consulted their friends and colleagues during their hardships. Advice taken from previously divorced men who had gone through similar processes was also valued.

While most fathers were dealing with a great amount of stress, only a few had recourse to psychologists. *Kemal* who underlined that he wasn't traumatized following divorce did not believe that someone from the outside could understand the internal dynamics of his relationship. Thus, he seemed inclined to devalue the help that could come from a third party. Back then, *Özgür* wanted a quick resolution, and preferred to go to a psychiatrist, and took antidepressants for a short period of time. It was interesting to see that fathers who were totally ready to consult child psychologists when their children were in question were not willing to seek professional help when their own well-being was at stake.

### **3.3.2.6. Societal Gaze to Divorced Men**

There were three different opinions when fathers were asked about the societal gaze to divorced men. The first category of fathers underlined how they felt stigmatized since they were divorced. They believed that being divorced had put them in a disadvantaged position, especially when interacting with a potential partner. These men expressed a need to prove to everyone that it was the relationship that did not work out, and that they did not have an inherent deficit. *Tuna* who considered the option of seeking professional help elaborated on the subject:

For instance, if I decide to marry in my next relationship, the parents of my girlfriend will have concerns about me.(...) 'He is divorced, he failed it. He probably has a deficit. Was he drinking alcohol? Was he beating his wife? Was he a loveless person? Did he have an attachment problem?' There will always be a prejudice, the etiquette is stuck on me forever. That's how I think. And I believe that I can only get along with a divorced woman (...). Only divorced people can understand divorced people (*Tuna*).

That during the interviews three of the fathers felt the need to emphasize how there was no physical violence involved during the conflicts with their ex-wives might be an illustration of this point. Below are the words of *Mert* which illustrate how stereotypes about divorced fathers existed and how they were interiorized by some of the fathers themselves:

I am very fond of children and family even though I look like a divorced person (...). There aren't any other divorced people in my family. In my family, I am the one who gives the most importance to family. In that sense, the fact that I am divorced is interesting (*Mert*).

A second category of fathers claimed that they never felt any positive or negative reactions when they communicated the information about being divorced. However, two of the fathers felt the need to underline how this was the case since they were residing in Istanbul, and belonging to an advantageous sociocultural and economic group. Again, several fathers underlined how the situation was different for women who had to deal with a lot more pressure.

I think that is a big problem for women. 'Widow'. In the society, there is an absurd logic. But when men are at stake, I have never seen any advantages or disadvantages. My ordinary life is continuing. I have never had a reaction about it, nobody said anything to me (*Alp*).

A third category of men stressed that being divorced was an advantage. According to *Kemal*, being divorced implied that the man had a reference since he was previously chosen by a woman and he was now available. Thus, he believed that other men envied divorced men while women wanted to be involved in romantic relationships with them.

Finally, while fathers' opinions diverged when asked about the positivity or negativity of the societal gaze - a gaze that some took into account, and others claimed to ignore - the majority underlined the critical criteria of judgment to be the fathers' attitudes towards their ex-wives, and above all their fatherhood performances: As long as the fathers fulfilled their responsibilities and they were fair enough fathers, no pressure seemed to be exerted on them. Thus, in the discourses of some fathers a covert defensive tone was sensed. Illustrating this



point, some of the fathers proposed to introduce their children to me in order to show me how their narratives were reflecting the reality. Ultimately, I was probably also perceived as a member of the society watching and evaluating their performances:

You have to support your ex-wife. Financially and emotionally... Even if you can't give emotional support, you have to be sure that she won't have to struggle financially. This is the definition of responsibility and it is a requirement of manhood (*Kemal*).

I may be a bad husband, but I am a very good ex-husband and a very good father. I am very assertive about this (*Emre*).

Overall, once again, fathers' post-divorce experiences converged and diverged in many respects. As a result, once again, we can talk of a continuum on which fathers were positioned depending on the combination of various factors. However, whatever their position on the continuum, all the fathers had encountered some challenges during the transition from marriage to divorce.

### **3.3.3. Different Dimensions of the Post-Divorce Father-Child Relationship**

#### **3.3.3.1. Crucial Importance of a Smooth Transition**

Challenges during the immediate post-divorce period both for children and their fathers have been summarized in the previous sections. Fathers adopted different strategies in order to ensure that the transition would not constitute a major rupture in the child's life.

Despite his multiple responsibilities related to the other domains of his life, *Kemal* managed to see his son every day; *Ekin* moved next door while *Alp* moved to a house in the same neighborhood, *Emre* moved into his mother's house since it was a familiar place for the child, and the mother and son continued to have dinner at the father's mother's house every evening, *Ali* and *Özgür* continued to go on family vacations with their children and former wives, and *Recep* did not change anything in the house – including the place of the photographs of his ex-wife who had left him without any prior notice. Making a smooth transition following

divorce, and ensuring the existence of a continuity between pre- and post-divorce contexts seemed to benefit not only the children, but also the anxious fathers - even though in the fathers' discourses it was usually the former who came to the forefront.

Being a divorced father is loaded with anxiety. You are far and you struggle in order to keep the bond. This is especially true since I live in another city. (...). I have worries about being excluded from his life. Thus, we do video calls every day. I visit him every week-end. Last year, I went to visit my son 47 weeks out of 52. It is tiring but I could always be beside him, and I could stay in his life. I managed to do so until now. I am hoping to continue to do it in the future (*Emre*).

Once the transition period was over, the level of anxiety related to the loss of children was normalized. Thus, many fathers expressed how they had understood that their fears concerning the loss of their children during the period of divorce were unrealistic. As can be seen, *Emre* who had moved into his mother's house right after divorce was now living in another city. Similarly, *Ekin* who had moved to the next building following the decision of separation had decided to leave Istanbul.

### **3.3.3.2. Symbolic Meaning of the Child's Room**

The existence of a child's room in the new house of the father had a symbolic meaning implying a continuity between pre- and post-divorce periods. In half of the cases, the children had a room of their own in the father's house:

I rented a house with a garden just because she wanted it. The first room to be prepared was hers. The pedagogue also told this. 'If she is going to stay with you, she should absolutely have a room of her own so that she knows that it is also her house.' We bought furniture for her room in my ex wife's house, and brought all her old furniture to my house. She has lots of toys. In the house, I am like a parasite [sığıntı] (*Alp*).

Two of the fathers were planning to make a room for their child in their future homes, but couldn't put the plans into action for the moment: As already mentioned, following divorce, *Tuna* had to return to his parents' house due to financial difficulties, and *Cem*'s court of appeal was still ongoing. Hereby, fathers

underlined how important the rapid establishment of the father's new order was for the psychological well-being of the child. Below, *Tuna* who had considerable concern about the power of his father-child bond, and who became very anxious when the child wanted to go back to his mother's house emphasized the symbolic importance of the room:

I want a house of my own, I don't want to be like a student anymore. I want an order of my own. In that order, I want my son to have a room of his own so that we can live in that house together. That is my biggest wish. I am sure that this will influence our relationship positively (*Tuna*).

### **3.3.3.3. New Romantic Partners of the Fathers**

When answering questions related to their romantic relationships, several fathers felt the need to underline the importance of self-care in order to become better parents. Having a partner was considered as a component of self-care. Ali who had devoted the major part of his life following the divorce to his daughter had decided to reconcile with his own needs after two years of single life.

I have to first fill my own cup with happiness and health, then I can pour something from this cup to an empty cup. I decided to be in a relationship and I have a relationship for six months (*Ali*).

Several fathers underlined how important it was that the partners accepted that their children would always be the priority. Some fathers even told anecdotes about how they had ended relationships when this was not the case. Alp who came to the location of the interview with his girlfriend stressed the fact that his relationship had no negative impact on his bond with his daughter with whom they were like lovers. Ali emphasized how the routine of the father-child meetings remained intact following the introduction of a new partner in his life. Only Yavuz genuinely accepted that he might have neglected his children while he had a girlfriend during the marriage.

The majority of the fathers distinguished between "serious" relationships that can be communicated to children, and those that must be lived silently. In addition, most of them preferred to introduce the partner to the child as a "friend"

since they did not want to confuse the child. However, this was not always the case since checking the information communicated to the child was not always possible. The excerpt below illustrates how complicated things can get since father-child relationships are rarely lived apart from the gaze of the mother. Mert seems to be the most vulnerable part of Kemal who otherwise makes fun of everything else :

I sent the message I was going to send to my girlfriend to Mert. He found out [that his father was in a relationship] like that. It was a New Year's eve. It was very bad. He refused to see me that night. A chill ran down my back. I had a terrible day, a terrible night and a terrible New Year's eve. You can't get it out of your mind, the man doesn't talk to you, he doesn't answer your phone calls. His mother scolds you, his aunt sends you messages. There was an attack from everywhere whereas it's none of their business. But things don't turn out that way. They find pretexts because there is still animosity and the refusal to accept the new context (*Kemal*).

#### **3.3.3.4. Awkwardness of the Reunion and Farewell Moments**

Feelings of estrangement were not uncommon right after the divorce. Three fathers underlined how the reunion and farewell moments were very challenging both for the child and themselves.

At the beginning, it was very hard for me. Farewell moments were unbelievable. They were big traumas. I leave her, I come home, and cry like crazy because I want to be with her, but I don't want to continue under those circumstances (*Ali*).

Still on Sundays when we are separating, he says 'I hate it when you go to Istanbul'. I tell him 'I will be here on Friday my son, I will be here in five days.' We relive this every week. (...) He locks the doors, he hugs me and doesn't leave me. But I think that lately he started to do these things as part of a routine (*Emre*).

Although these fathers did their best in order to attenuate the effects of the rupture caused by divorce, these two moments were a reminder that something had changed irreversibly.

#### **3.3.3.5. Influence of the Mothers as Gatekeepers**

As the custodial parent, mothers were considered as the gatekeepers of the post-divorce father-child relationship by the fathers. Since fathers seemed to be

aware of their relative powerlessness when compared to the mothers, all of them struggled in order to maintain a civilized relationship with their ex-wives at some point following marriage. Half of the fathers qualified their current relationship with their ex-wives as above average. Thus, some underlined that their divorce was “weird” or “not normal” when compared to other divorces: The use of these adjectives also showed how fathers thought that divorces must be problematic and conflictual. Seven of the fathers thought that their current relationships with their ex-wives had improved when compared to the times immediately after the divorce.

#### **3.3.3.6. Sharing the Responsibilities of the Child with the Mother**

Since children were living with their mothers, the mothers were informed about all the details of the children’s lives whereas fathers usually depended on the mothers in order to learn about the schedules and routines of the children.

When the mother and father got along naturally or for the sake of the child, fathers took over some of the responsibilities of the mothers and alleviated their burden. Thus, these fathers did not only share moments of fun with their children on specific days predetermined by the state authorities, but they also accompanied their children in their daily routines – hobbies, doctor appointments, school performances, friends’ gatherings, etc.

Some fathers pointed out to the difference between the mother and father functions, and expressed with pride how mothers had recourse to the fathers as a source of authority when they felt insufficient. These fathers underlined how children behaved differently depending on the presence of a specific parent. For instance, when boundary-setting or courage was required, as in the case of a dentist appointment, they were the ones to step forward. Some of the fathers’ discourses were clearly reproducing the gender stereotypes.

When the couple relationship was conflict-free, fathers also took part in the decision-making processes related to the children. The majority of the fathers emphasized that they collaborated with their ex-wives when there were important

decisions to be made about the life of the child. The fact that these fathers were still the main economic providers in some cases might also be an influential factor in ensuring the collaboration.

When Nevra is at stake, we leave our egos aside. I think we are both very lucky. She is very lucky since she has an ex-husband like me, and I feel very lucky since I have an ex-wife like her (*Bilge*).

Having a conflictual relationship with his ex-wife, *Recep* who was very dominant during the decision-making processes within the marriage was now retreated to a rather passive position:

For instance the change of school of my daughter... She was taken from (here, he mentions the name of a private primary school) and given to a state school. I heard about this. Nobody asked me anything. Nobody told me where her new school was, or what the name of the school was. My daughter told it and she showed her school to me. Thus, I have no idea about the decisions. Decisions are made and applied. If by chance I hear them, I hear them. If not, I don't (*Recep*).

### **3.3.3.7. Evaluation of the Current Father-Child Relationship**

All the fathers, except Tuna, described the predivorce father-child relationship very positively. When asked about their current father-child relationships, while all the fathers without exception used very positive words, it was obvious that some had ambivalent thoughts: *Ali* thought that their relationship was sincere but also tense; *Bilge* mentioned feelings of insufficiency and guilt, and *Kemal* qualified the relationship as loving but anxiety loaded.

Interestingly, many fathers pointed out to an amelioration of the father-child relationship following divorce. The explanations given were as follows: Fathers and children could be together without being accompanied by a third person, fathers could have quality time with their children since on visiting days they could concentrate fully on their children, and as children grew older, channels of communication were more diversified.

The intention to entertain the children or the fun dimension of the post-divorce father-child relationship was emphasized by many fathers. Although this reminded of the “Disneyland type interaction” between the father and the child in the post-divorce period, it seemed like as anxieties attenuated with time, and as fathers became more confident about themselves as well as about the stability and quality of the post-divorce father-child relationship, an equilibrium was increasingly set between the amount of entertainment and discipline. In other terms, the post-divorce relationships were normalized, and were no longer strikingly different in quality when compared to the predivorce relationships.

#### **3.3.3.8. The Ideal Father-Child Relationship**

Fathers’ projections for the future of the father-child relationship were quite similar. Most fathers underlined the intention of a friendly and close relationship where there were no clear boundaries intimidating the child and preventing the communication of all sorts of information. However, these fathers also underlined that there was a thin line that children must not transgress.

Half of the fathers underlined how they wanted to be mentors and guides in the father-child relationship. While several fathers seemed to be latently imposing their ideals about the future on their children who took them as role models, none of the fathers were explicitly dictating anything to their children. Thus, they stressed how they wished their children would decide personally on their own future, and how as their fathers, they would be ready to provide both material and emotional support whenever needed.

While some had concerns about the adolescence of the children, almost all the fathers were very hopeful about the future. They believed that as children matured, and fathers were better able to express themselves, the father-child relationship would certainly improve.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION

In this study, twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with divorced fathers in order to understand different dynamics of the father-child relationship in the post-divorce period, i.e. interrelationship between pre- and post-divorce father-child relationships, thoughts and feelings of fathers in the post-divorce period, and impeding and facilitating factors of the post-divorce father-child relationship.

When one looks at the stories of the fathers which were retrospectively constructed, the interviews revealed that the transition to parenthood was not so peaceful in many of the cases. In fact, it was quite unsettling for the majority of the fathers. First, not all fathers were equally willing to become a father. While all the fathers tried to support their wives during pregnancy, they attributed different meanings to the unborn baby. Many fathers were oscillating between expectations and anxieties. The pregnancy period was especially difficult. Several fathers pointed out to the existence of a variety of problematic issues, some being related to the pregnancy itself, and others to negative life events, the influence of which were exacerbated due to the ongoing pregnancy. Fathers' accounts showed how mothers and fathers had experienced the pregnancy period quite differently.

Following the birth of their offspring, fathers did their best in order to be involved in the “affective, cognitive, and behavioral components” of childcare (Castillo & Sarver, 2012, p. 761). The majority of the fathers expressed having the required motivation and skills for paternal involvement (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 1981). That children were the common responsibility of both parents, the exhaustion of the mothers especially in the first months after birth and the interrelationship between caregiving and bonding were all mentioned by fathers who were willing to participate actively in the process. The attitudes of these fathers were in conformity with the changing sociocultural expectations of fatherhood (Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Furstenberg, 1988; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 1981;



Marks & Palkovitz, 2004). The present generation of fathers seemed to be more inclined to share the burden of childcare with the mother (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009).

Illustrating the crucial role played by the intergenerational transmission of fatherhood (Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Bowlby, 1988; Brown et al., 2018), one of the major criteria predicting the efficacy of paternal involvement seems to be the attitudes of the fathers' own fathers. In accordance with the modeling and compensation hypotheses (Beaton & Doherty, 2007), half of the fathers took their own fathers as points of reference. Fathers' fathers constituted role models when fathers were satisfied with the parenting performances of their own fathers during their childhood. When a troubled relationship was in question, they tried to avoid committing similar mistakes.

Several fathers explained their intention of contributing to childcare by putting forward its positive influence on bonding. While some fathers had no difficulties in bonding to their child which was quite automatic, others underlined how it took time, and how reciprocal communication was necessary for father-child bonding to occur. Some underlined the importance of the sex of the child. The great majority of the fathers were able to form a strong father-child bond during marriage.

Despite the willingness of contributing to childcare, many fathers mentioned the existence of obstacles which undermined their parenting capacities. One of the major obstacles was the dominant and criticizing spouse who was not inclined to share parental responsibilities with the father. Perceptions of losing authority, and of not being able to connect with the child were expressed by these fathers. This could be considered as a major loss in an era when traditional gender roles are increasingly put into question due to the acceptance of the interchangeability of maternal and paternal roles (Furstenberg, 1988; Guignard, 2014; Rehel, 2014; Risman, 1986; Rossi, 1968).

Another factor that limited paternal contribution to childcare was the pervasiveness of the breadwinning component of the father's role. Some of the

fathers underlined how the length of the working hours was impeding the father-child relationship. Thus, the impact of the institutional barriers was decisive (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 1981). While the majority accommodated to the pressure of external factors, several fathers adopted strategies in order to push the limits such as choosing to stay unemployed for a significant period of time in order to form a bond with the child, changing the direction of a successful career in order to assist the child who was having emotional difficulties when left with a babysitter, and limiting the amount of work days in order to spend more time with his son. All the interviewees underlined how they were struggling in order to balance different dimensions of the paternal role.

It is not possible to observe the discrepancies between the attitudes and actual behaviors of the fathers due to the nature of self-reports. In addition, there might be the impact of the social desirability bias leading to distortions of the actual experiences. Fathers usually preferred to avoid responsibility by pointing out to the impact of external factors. Still, the expression of negative feelings such as powerlessness, worthlessness, insufficiency, anger and resentment, when fathers were unable to perform their roles, might be illustrating their sincere intentions about becoming an active participant in the process of childrearing during marriage. Comparing themselves to other – and mostly bad – fathers, as well as their own fathers, all the fathers believed that they did their best in the existing circumstances. Demographic analysis of the sample also explains why the self-reports might be reflecting a great deal of the real experiences of at least some of the fathers: Research underlines the positive correlation between paternal involvement and educational and socioeconomic background (Cabrera et al., 2007; Marks & Palkovitz, 2004).

Fathers' narratives showed how child birth affected the couple relationship in a negative way. The couple, and especially the mother, had become child-centered. The couple's sexual life had gradually – and in some cases abruptly – disappeared. It was as if the father had been replaced by the child. In some cases, the mother had started to sleep with the child. In addition, several fathers underlined

the surfacing of latent conflicts between the couple triggered by disagreements related to the upbringing and care of the child. Although some of the respondents tried to empathize with their wives who were obviously exhausted because of the needs of the newborn infant and underlined the effects of the postpartum period in order to explain the negative comments and reactions of their wives, feelings such as anger, disappointment and suffocation were all expressed during the interviews. It must be stressed that none of the fathers expressed any negative feelings towards the child.

What has been said so far does not seem to be specific to the context of Turkey since the same problems might emerge in every corner of the world following child birth. However, there was also another factor that influenced negatively the couple relationship, i.e. the presence of the father's mother-in-law within the household. In accordance with the "family model of emotional/psychological interdependence" (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2002), the father's mother-in-law became a temporary family member following the birth of the child in order to contribute to childcare. This put an end to the privacy of the nuclear family both symbolically and literally. As a result, the boundaries separating the household from the external world became trivial.

Accounts of the fathers illustrate how the arrival of a baby shakes the ground even when relatively low-risk families are in question since both the problems of the individuals and those of the couple are amplified following the introduction of a third variable into the system. This in turn brings forth the crucial importance of professional interventions during this risky transitional period (Cowan & Cowan, 1995). This portrayal of the transition seems to be confirming Bronfenbrenner's (1977) hypothesis of the second-order effect. According to the author's ecological systems theory, a relationship between a dyad can never be fully understood without taking into consideration the effects of the presence of other factors in the surrounding environment since there is a constant interaction between all the elements of the overall system. The birth of the baby perfectly shows how the introduction of an additional element into the system destabilizes the whole system.

Thus, some of the fathers experienced the transition period quite painfully and felt as if they gained a child, but lost a wife: “The onset of pregnancy marked the end of the honeymoon stage of the marital role” (Rossi, 1968). The couple’s phantasy of becoming one by giving life to a child (Parman, 2007) ended up in a resilience test of the couple relationship. Interestingly, many couples failed the resilience test and their relationship deteriorated in an abrupt way following the birth of the child (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). However, it must be stressed that by tracing a certain framework, the subject of the interview and the selection of the questions might have led the fathers towards a child-centered narrative. Fathers might have explained their divorce journey very differently if the focus of the questions was not the child.

Many fathers underlined how they tried to remain married for the sake of children. Interestingly, the final decision of divorce was also given for the sake of children since children were witnessing the interparental conflicts. Right before the marriage, fathers had to deal with various sources of anxiety. Fathers were especially concerned about the impact of physical distance on the future of father-child relationships. The level of anxiety was exacerbated when fathers were not on good terms with their wives. This was especially true when the separation was preceded by a betrayal story. Some fathers were even suspicious about not being able to see the child again. Fathers were also anxious about the reactions of the children. Age of the child was a decisive factor in this respect. Potential partners of the mothers were also problematic. During this phase of the divorce process, many couples had recourse to child psychologists.

The judicial process was experienced differently by the fathers. Depending on the amount of interparental conflict, while some cases endured several years, others were very quickly dealt with. Several fathers emphasized the negative impact of aggressive lawyers on the couple relationship during the trials. Children had witnessed these conflictual situations. The majority of the fathers had no intention to take the custody of the child since they believed that young children needed their mothers. Two fathers were exceptions: One father asked for joint custody, while

the other wanted sole custody. According to their accounts, and bearing in mind the three components of paternal involvement, i.e. interaction, availability and responsibility (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 1981), it was interesting to observe that these two fathers were the ones who took over the majority of child responsibilities during marriage. Despite the different experiences, the best interests of the child were repeated in the fathers' narratives. Consequently, none of the fathers seemed to have any problems with paying child custody. However, it must be stressed that they also had the means to pay the amount.

Children's reactions to divorce were diverse according to the fathers. In case of interparental conflict was low, children had difficulties about making sense of the separation. Thus, many fathers mentioned children's unexpected questions related to the divorce. Several fathers underlined how their children had given mature reactions while others talked about the emergence of psychosomatic symptoms. In case of major interparental conflict during marriage, children seemed to be relieved following the decision of divorce. A few fathers emphasized how it was difficult to understand the real feelings of the children since for some of them, the subject was a taboo. Despite the variation of reactions, the great majority of the fathers were aware that their children preserved a phantasy of bringing their parents back together in the future. Thus, the continuation of family routines was a major issue of controversy. For some, it was crucial in order to ensure a smooth transition for the child, for others, it gave the child an unrealistic hope. Overall, children experienced different levels of grief and relief depending on the dynamics of the family system.

Divorce constitutes a major rupture for all members of the family since the transition involves physical, emotional and relational difficulties (Castillo & Sarver, 2012). Thus, fathers - who are usually the ones to leave the family house - also have hard times during this process. Fathers expressed ambiguous feelings about being single again. Several fathers underlined the coexistence of contradictory feelings, i.e. the joy of freedom, and the decrease of the burden related to family responsibilities on one side, and feelings of loneliness and void on the other. The

existing framework had suddenly disappeared. Fathers were free to choose any pathway which was simultaneously relieving and scary.

During the interviews, various strategies were used by the fathers in order to avoid self-blame. Some pointed out to the normalization of divorce, others underlined how their children were doing well, and still others emphasized that divorce was best for the child when the conditions of the marriage were taken into consideration (Emery, 1982). When asked about the societal gaze towards divorced fathers, opinions were divergent. Some fathers underlined how being a divorced father was an advantage. A second group of fathers emphasized how being divorced had no impact on men. Underlining that this hypothesis is valid in big cities and for some socioeconomic and cultural groups, these fathers compared the situation of divorced fathers to that of divorced mothers, and claimed that as long as fathers fulfill their responsibilities as ex-husbands and as fathers, no pressure is exerted on them. Examples of absent fathers were given “as a comparison or reference point” (Arendell, 1992, p. 566) in order to prove that one was doing a good fathering job. Obstacles that had to be overcome by the divorced fathers in order to reach out to their children were stressed so as to prove their efforts. As fathers who provide for their children and who do their best in order to spend time with them, most fathers were satisfied with their performances (Seltzer, 1991). However, when listening to the discourses of these men, it seems inevitable to bear in mind the low expectations of the society from divorced fathers due to the number of absent fathers (Erera & Baum, 2009). Finally, a third group of fathers were more pessimistic since they pointed out to the existence of societal prejudices. It was interesting to see that many fathers felt the need to underline that there was no physical violence during the divorce process. Self-stigmatization was also encountered in these fathers’ narratives.

Illustrating once again Kağıtçıbaşı’s (2002) family model of emotional/psychological interdependence, the main support systems – both materially and emotionally – of the majority of the fathers following the dissolution of marriage was the family of origin, and especially fathers’ mothers. Some parents

moved to the house of their parents following divorce due to insufficient economic resources, others not living with their parents preferred to see their children in their parents' house, in a warm family atmosphere. Fathers who had anxiety-provoking questions related to the future of the father-child relationship were also comforted by their parents.

Overall, the accounts of the majority of the fathers illustrate how divorce must be considered as a process rather than a single event (Amato, 2000). While some fathers experienced divorce as a short period of crisis, for many fathers, the negative consequences of divorce are still ongoing. The chronic strain is especially observable when fathers witness the difficulties of their children who cannot make sense of the new “family” dynamics. Unexpected questions popping up during the father-child interactions might pave the way to a challenging self-interrogation at any moment. Thus, many fathers expressed how they feel guilt, how they were angry at themselves, and how they considered the divorce as a personal failure.

In addition, the fact that Turkey is still a relatively collectivistic, traditional and patriarchal society despite the winds of change due to the impact of the West (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2002; Sunar & Fişek, 2005) might be exacerbating these negative feelings. Although there is a gradual and slow change towards a more involved fatherhood and a more egalitarian division of parenthood between the partners, the society still expects fathers to assume the role of the head of the family (AÇEV report, 2017; Boratav et al., 2018; Sancar, 2009; Yalçınöz, 2011). Thus, a divorced father becomes a source of disturbance for the conservative fractions of the society.

What would happen had the interviews been conducted by a male interviewer remains unknown. Which one is easier? Sharing such a personal story and expressing negative feelings about oneself to a female interviewer or a male one? In fact, fathers not only answered the questions but also opened themselves up during the interviews. It seemed like they had an urge to tell their side of the story, and express their feelings and thoughts about the subject. With two of the fathers, we had to arrange a second appointment. At the end of the interviews, some fathers

wondered whether they needed therapy. Interestingly, only a few fathers mentioned having recourse to professional help during the divorce process. According to Selek (2008), in a society where men are expected to be tough, i.e. to put on a show of manhood, talking about one's vulnerable side may not always be easy. Thus, the disproportion between the fathers who had recourse to psychologists for their own well-being and those for the well-being of their children might be expected.

Many fathers who are unable to cope with this tension choose to cease contact with their children, a short-term solution with long-term devastating effects not only for children, but also for fathers at an unconscious level. Several researchers underline how father-child relationships fade away with time due to the negative impact of external factors on fathering practices (Arditti et al., 2018; Doherty et al., 1998; Furstenberg, 1988; Seltzer, 1991). At present, ceasing contact with the children was absolutely not considered as an alternative by the fathers in this study. However, it is impossible to know the thoughts and feelings of the fathers during different stages following divorce. In addition, confessing such - conscious or unconscious - intentions towards a deeply loved object, i.e. the child, is never easy.

Fathers emphasize how the establishment of post-divorce father-child relationships was not tension-free. Their narratives illustrate how it was extremely difficult for them, especially in the period right after divorce, to adapt to the new circumstances since they were physically separated from their children. The tiring efforts of the fathers in order to make a smooth transition both for themselves and for their children during this episode point to the deep anxiety in relation to their children. Some examples include moving next door, buying a motorcycle in order to reach the children as fast as possible, and continuing routines such as going on vacation as a family. The child's room in the father's new house gained a special meaning during this process: The room literally and symbolically implied that the father had reserved a place to the child in his new life. Although it was the children's well-being that was put forward in the narratives related to the smooth transition, it



may also be interpreted as beneficial for the fathers themselves. In fact, many underlined how miserable they felt in the post-divorce period.

The most influential actor on the post-divorce father-child relationship seemed to be the mother who functioned either as a gatekeeper or a moderator (Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994). All the fathers were aware that they were disadvantaged when compared to the custodial parent. While half of the fathers had personal problems with their wives, in most of the cases, ex-spouses managed to distinguish personal issues from parental responsibilities when children were at stake. Comparing the current situation with the period right after divorce, an important number of fathers stressed how their relationships with their ex-wives were back on track, and how they both learned to cooperate with each other in order to take into consideration the best interests of the child. Many fathers underlined how they appreciated the attitude of their ex-wives, and stressed the existence of a trust relationship between them, a problematic issue in many of the divorce cases as mentioned by Erera and Baum (2009). Finally, several fathers emphasized that the greatest support in the post-divorce period was their ex-wives. In this sense, the evaluation of the fathers of the couple's performance in relation to the well-being of the child in the post-divorce period was quite positive.

Consequently, the majority of the fathers underlined how the protocol signed during the trial was solely symbolic, that they could see their child whenever they desired, that decisions related to the child were made in cooperation, and that fathers were keeping track of the daily lives of their children. According to the accounts of some fathers, the couple had made a division of labor when dealing with the child. That they intervened in case of a need of authority and boundary-setting was expressed by several fathers. Mothers' need of the fathers' assistance seemed to be a source of pride for some.

Fathers expressed many negative feelings such as remorse, anxiety, fear, insufficiency and hopelessness in relation to post-divorce father-child relationships. However, powerlessness which was experienced mainly by divorced fathers who

could not pay child support due to lack of economic resources (Erera & Baum, 2009) was not mentioned. At this point, it seems crucial to remember that the sample was constituted of fathers who were relatively well-off. This seems to be confirming the positive correlation between socioeconomic status of the father and the degree of paternal involvement indicated in the literature on divorced fatherhood (Cheadle et al., 2010; Seltzer, 1991; Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009).

Although meeting and separation moments were still painful both for the fathers and the children, the majority of the fathers underlined how their fears and anxieties at the beginning of the divorce process had vanished over time. Some fathers even claimed that the post-divorce father-child relationship was better than the predivorce one. According to the fathers, children who had two homes now were genuinely happy. As to the expectations about the future, almost all the fathers seemed to envision an open, close, and loving father-child relationship. They underlined how they were always ready to provide both material and emotional support to their children in order to ensure the establishment of such a relationship. In this respect, all the fathers appeared to be full of hope. Overall, the experiences of these fathers illustrate how it is the way parents divorce, and not the divorce itself, that is problematic for the children (Coltrane & Adams, 2003).

Relieved by the stabilization of the father-child relationship in the post-divorce period, several fathers underlined how they were now able to concentrate on more personal issues such as romantic relationships. Consequently, the majority of the fathers are currently in a committed relationship. Whether they will remarry or have other children, and the impact of these developments on the existing father-child relationship are yet to be seen.

#### **4.1. Conclusion**

The first research question of this study was whether there was a continuity between pre- and post-divorce father-child relationships. Fathers who had a good father-child relationship in the predivorce period continued to have good relationships with their offsprings in the post-divorce period. Some fathers

underlined how there was a period of rupture due to the disappointment of the children. Fathers who claimed that they were unable to form a bond with the child due to the age of the child or the impact of external factors also managed to establish a satisfying father-child relationship in the post-divorce period. Thus, regardless of their level of involvement in the predivorce period, all the fathers in the sample took a very active stance in the post-divorce period, and put a tremendous effort in order to make the transition period easy and smooth both for their children and themselves. Especially right after divorce, despite their personal issues, they acted in a selfless way, and considered their children as their priority. In the end, the post-divorce father-child relationship of many fathers became better when compared to the past. In short, it is possible to talk of a continuity, and even of an amelioration when looking at the relationship between pre- and post-divorce father-child relationships.

The second research interest was about the main thoughts and feelings of divorced fathers in relation to their children in the post-divorce period. Interviewees expressed many negative feelings about being a divorced father, and especially a great anxiety related to their children. These feelings were exacerbated in case of severe interparental conflict. Some of the fathers had suspicions about not seeing their children ever again. Many fathers experienced divorce as a failure, and several fathers' statements pointed out to a deep narcissistic injury as a man. However, these negative feelings were attenuated with time and the aid of professional and informal support systems. In addition, many fathers' relationships with their ex-wives improved which was a great relief for these fathers since mothers were the gatekeepers of the children. Society's impact on the feelings and thoughts of divorced fathers was contradictory: On one hand, fathers underlined that society's pressure was less on divorced men when compared to women, on the other hand the ongoing patriarchal and collectivistic nature of the social tissue requiring men to be the head of the family caused a harsh self-questioning process within the fathers that seemed to be still persistent. Despite efforts of rationalizing the decision of divorce, negative feelings such as guilt, remorse, sadness and anger towards

oneself seemed to be present in the fathers' narratives, especially when children were at stake.

The final research interest was about different actors and factors impeding or facilitating the post-divorce father-child relationships. The major factor both impeding and facilitating the post-divorce father-child relationship depending on the context seemed to be the mother of the child. The majority of the fathers underlined how their major support in the post-divorce period was their ex-wives, and how the protocol limiting the paternal involvement with the child in the post-divorce period was not applied in their cases. These fathers compared themselves with other divorced fathers who had major difficulties interacting with their ex-wives and consequently with their children once the marital dissolution occurred. One of the fathers who had a very conflictual relationship with his ex-wife was a good illustration of the importance of this figure. Many fathers also emphasized how their family of origin, and above all their mothers, were a catalyzer in the post-divorce father-child relationship. Finally, a very important factor in the sustainability of the post-divorce father-child relationship seemed to be the socioeconomic status of the father. All the fathers in the sample were contributing materially to their children's lives. Consequently, they were taking part in the decisions made in relation to their children, and they were enjoying the status of an equal co-parent.

#### **4.2. Limitations and Recommendation for Future Research**

This study has some limitations. First, self-reports of the fathers might be giving a one-sided picture of the post-divorce father-child relationships since the experiences of the mothers and children were not taken into account. Future research might complement the discourses of the fathers with those of mothers and children in order to understand the divorce process from different perspectives.

Second, the sample was constituted of fathers who had a relatively high income and education level. The positive influence of the father's socioeconomic capital has been indicated throughout this study. Thus, the findings may not be

generalizable to the entire population. Future research might use a mixed method, and enlarge the sample in order to understand the post-divorce fatherhood experiences of different socioeconomic categories.

Third, many fathers were recently divorced in this study. Consequently, it was not possible to say much about the long-term evolution of the father-child relationships, an important dimension since father-child contact is inclined to diminish with time (Juby et al., 2007). Follow-up studies might reveal different stages of the post-divorce fatherhood experience.

Finally, this study mainly focused on the experiences of the nuclear family. Although sometimes touched upon, the impact of the extended family on the mother-father-child triad throughout the whole process was not analyzed. Since Turkey is still partly identified as a collectivistic country, the marriage of two people implies the marriage of two families. Consequently, in divorce, the extended families of each partner separate as well. Illustrating this point, in some of the interviews, the fathers mentioned the conflicts between their families and the families of their ex-wives, and some underlined how they did not want the families to get involved since things would get more complicated. In order to better understand the meaning of what fathers think, feel, say, and experience in the post-divorce period, it would be enlightening to probe into the actions and reactions of the other members of the extended family who might be deeply influencing the nuclear family dynamics.

### **4.3. Clinical Implications for Future Intervention**

Effective interventions require the understanding of the perspective of the fathers (Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994). The dissatisfaction of the fathers leads to the dissatisfaction of the whole system. There seems to be no hierarchy since the same can be said for mothers and children.

Fathers' accounts pointed out to the existence of various problems during the transition to parenthood period. Short-term interventions and educational

programs would be helpful for candidate parents. Future parents must be aware of a multitude of potential changes: During pregnancy, parents might experience negative feelings such as fear or anxiety. Fathers might feel alienation and have difficulties bonding with the child. The couple, and especially the mother, might temporarily become extremely child focused. Mothers' mood might be fluctuating due to the hormonal changes and the burden of childcare. In some cases, women might have to deal with symptoms of postpartum depression. All of these developments might lead to the temporary decline of sexuality.

Many fathers underlined how in the first years after birth, their parenting capacities were undermined and how paternal involvement was impeded due to the impact of the interaction of individual, relational and institutional factors. Seminars for mothers, fathers and in some cases grandmothers [anneanne] who play a major part in childcare must be organized. During these seminars, the importance of paternal contribution to different dimensions of child development, the relationship between childcare and bonding, and the interchangeability of the maternal and paternal roles must be discussed. Programs similar to AÇEV's father support programs must be organized, and fathers' participation to these programs must be encouraged in order to empower them. Mass media must be attentive so as not to reproduce gender stereotypes. Finally, the length of the paternal leave following birth must be extended.

In case of severe interparental conflict, parents should seriously consider couple therapy even when they planned the divorce as the best option for the well-being of their children. Couple therapists who intervene during this process must be careful to take into account the dynamics of all parties and be able to work with multidisciplinary teams.

The different actors involved in the divorce process must be cautious in order to respect the best interests of the child. Lawyers must be sensitive to avoid increasing the tension between the couple even though they intend to protect the rights of their clients. Witnessing physical or psychological conflict between

parents might be traumatizing for many children. It must be kept in mind that these children are already dealing with major transitions in their lives. Thus, they may need psychotherapy or counseling for better outcomes of divorce. Bearing in mind the anxiety and fear of divorcing fathers who will be losing the custody of their children, forensic psychologists must do their best in order to help them. In case of a good couple relationship during divorce, joint custody might be more often considered as an alternative. Thus, fathers might feel more responsibility in relation to their children in the post-divorce period, and their anxieties during the period of divorce might be attenuated.

Although divorce must not be considered as a catastrophe, it is a difficult period for everyone involved since a new life is starting while the former one with all the routines is disappearing. Since fathers who get support will reestablish their new order more quickly, will have better relationships with their ex-wives, and will welcome their children in their new lives with more enthusiasm, seeking professional help following divorce must be encouraged. During therapy sessions, psychologists must try to understand the interrelationship between patriarchal dictates at the macro level, and the fathers' way of giving meaning to the situation at the micro level. The aim of therapy must be to open a space where fathers express their negative feelings without any concern about being judged. Therapists should accompany these fathers in the following discovery: Divorce only implies that these fathers could no longer envision a future as a couple, and nothing more. Hopefully, fathers who internalize this premise will feel relieved, and concentrate more fully on the well-being of the post-divorce father-child relationship.

Group therapies consisting of divorced fathers might also be provided in the communities. Thus, fathers will be sharing their experiences. This, in turn, might attenuate feelings of loneliness in the post-divorce period.

In case a major tension does not exist, post-divorce couple therapy might be very useful and the couple might express their feelings about the process in a containing environment without turning against each other. This in turn might

reduce the pressure exerted on both sides, and have positive effects on the well-being of the couple as well as on the child.

Child psychologists working with separated families must make considerable effort to integrate fathers into the therapy processes of children. In order to ensure the participation of divorced fathers, they must provide a non-judgemental and containing atmosphere for all the family members. They must contact fathers directly, establish a one-to-one relationship with them, be insistent in case fathers are reluctant to participate, and make them feel functional and important.

When fathers have reservations about therapy, campaigns might be designed in order to inform divorced fathers about the best ways to approach their children: Fathers might then learn about the symbolic importance of the child's room in the father's new house or the optimum time interval before the introduction of a new partner into the father's life when post-divorce father-child relationship is at stake.

By opening up a space for self-expression, this study tried to explore the different dynamics of the post-divorce fatherhood experience. Fathers told their stories genuinely. They were all unique. However, the coming together of these stories hopefully will give the reader important hints about what it is like to be a divorced father. Such a discovery, in turn, might instill hope about effective interventions that would enhance the lives of all the "family" members in the post-divorce period. However, for this to happen, everyone must take an active stance in order to challenge gender stereotypes. These stereotypes put an enormous burden both on men and women, although they are no more than mere social constructions.



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## Appendix 1. The Consent Form

### Gönüllü Katılım Formu

Bu araştırma İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Klinik Psikoloji Yüksek Lisans Programı Çocuk-Ergen bölümü öğrencisi Seda Doğan'ın bitirme tezi kapsamında, Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Elif Akdağ Göçek danışmanlığında yürütülmektedir. Araştırma, boşanma sonrası baba-çocuk ilişkisinin farklı boyutlarını babaların bakış açısından incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu araştırma için İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Etik Komisyonu'ndan gerekli izinler alınmıştır.

Araştırma süresince elde edilen bilgiler sadece bilimsel amaçlar için kullanılacaktır. Katılımcıların gerçek isimleri kaldırılarak, görüşmeler gizlilik esasına uygun bir şekilde saklanacaktır. Araştırmaya katılımınız tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayanmaktadır. Herhangi bir nedenden dolayı sorulara cevap vermek istemediğiniz takdirde, çalışmaya katılımınızı sonlandırabilirsiniz.

Görüşme, 1.5-2 saat sürecektir. Görüşme anında verdiğiniz cevaplar daha sonra detaylı bir şekilde incelenmek amacıyla, izin verdiğiniz takdirde, kayıt cihazı kullanılarak kaydedilecektir. Görüşmeler çözümlendikten sonra metinler size okumanız ve onaylamanız için verilecektir. Çözümlemiş metinler üzerinde ekleme, çıkartma ve düzeltmeler yapabilirsiniz.

Çalışmayla ilgili sorularınız için [sedadogan@sabanciuniv.edu](mailto:sedadogan@sabanciuniv.edu) e-posta adresinden araştırmacıya ulaşabilirsiniz.

Araştırmaya yaptığınız katkıdan dolayı teşekkür ederiz.



***Bu alıřmaya tamamen gnll olarak katılıyorum ve istediđim zaman bırakabileceđimi biliyorum. Verdiđim bilgilerin kimliđim gizli kalmak řartıyla bilimsel amalı yayınlarda kullanılmasını kabul ediyorum.***

- Grřmenin sesli olarak kayıt altına alınmasını kabul ediyorum. Herhangi bir sebepten tr kayıt alınmasından rahatsız olduđum takdirde kaydın durdurulup silineceđini ve grřmenin sonlandırılacađını biliyorum.

Adı ve soyadı

Tarih

İmza

----/----/-----

## Appendix 2. The Demographic Information Form

KOD NO:

### DEMOGRAFİK BİLGİ FORMU

1. Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın cinsiyeti:
2. Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın doğum tarih(ler)i:
3. Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın size olan biyolojik yakınlık derecesi:
  - Öz
  - Üvey
  - Evlatlık
4. Yaşınız:
5. Boşanma sonrasında herhangi bir ilişki yaşadınız mı?
  - Evet, yaşadım.
  - Hayır, yaşamadım.
6. Şu anki medeni durumunuz:
  - Yeniden evlendim.
  - Bekarım ve birlikte olduğum birisi yok.
  - Bekarım ve birlikte olduğum birisi var.
7. Eğitim düzeyiniz:
  - İlköğretim
  - Lise
  - Üniversite
  - Lisansüstü
  - Doktora
8. Mesleğiniz:
9. Şu anda çalışıyor musunuz?
  - Evet, çalışıyorum.
  - Hayır, çalışmıyorum.

10. Ortalama geliriniz:

- 0-2.000 TL
- 2.000-5.000 TL
- 5.000-10.000 TL
- 10.000-15.000 TL
- 15.000 TL ve üzeri

11. Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın annesinin yaşı:

12. Boşanma sonrasında çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın annesi herhangi bir ilişki yaşadı mı?

- Evet, yaşadı.
- Hayır, yaşamadı.
- Bilmiyorum.

13. Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın annesinin medeni durumu:

- Yeniden evlendi.
- Bekar ve birlikte olduğu birisi yok.
- Bekar ve birlikte olduğu birisi var.
- Bilmiyorum.

14. Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın annesinin eğitim düzeyi:

- İlköğretim
- Lise
- Üniversite
- Lisansüstü
- Doktora

15. Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın annesinin mesleği:

16. Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın annesi şu anda çalışıyor mu?

- Evet, çalışıyor.
- Hayır, çalışmıyor.

17. Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın annesinin ortalama geliri:

- 0-2.000 TL
- 2.000-5.000 TL
- 5.000-10.000 TL
- 10.000-15.000 TL
- 15.000 TL ve üzeri.

18. Eski eşinizle evlilik öncesi bir flört dönemi yaşadınız mı?

- Evet, yaşadık.  
 Hayır, yaşamadık.

19. (Bir önceki soruya cevabınız “evet” ise) Bu flört dönemi ne kadar sürdü?

20. Evlilik tarihiniz:

21. Boşanma tarihiniz:

22. Aşağıda farklı evrelerde eski eşinizle olan ilişkinizi değerlendirmeniz beklenmektedir. (“1” çok huzursuz/çok çatışmalı, “5” çok huzurlu/çatışmasız olmak üzere 1, 2, 3, 4 veya 5 seçeneğini yuvarlak içine alınız)

22.a. Resmi olarak evlenmeden önce eski eşinizle olan ilişkinizi değerlendirir misiniz?

1 (çok huzursuz/çok çatışmalı) .....2.....3.....4.....5 (çok huzurlu/çatışmasız)

22.b. Evlilikten sonra, ilk çocuğunuzun doğumundan önce eski eşinizle olan ilişkinizi değerlendirir misiniz?

1 (çok huzursuz/çok çatışmalı) .....2.....3.....4.....5 (çok huzurlu/çatışmasız)

22.c. İlk çocuğunuzun doğumundan sonra eski eşinizle olan ilişkinizi değerlendirir misiniz?

1 (çok huzursuz/çok çatışmalı) .....2.....3.....4.....5 (çok huzurlu/çatışmasız)

22.d. İkinci çocuğunuzun doğumundan sonra eski eşinizle olan ilişkinizi değerlendirir misiniz? (Tek çocuğunuz varsa bu soruyu atlayabilirsiniz)

1 (çok huzursuz/çok çatışmalı) .....2.....3.....4.....5 (çok huzurlu/çatışmasız)

22.e. Üçüncü çocuğunuzun doğumundan sonra eski eşinizle olan ilişkinizi değerlendirir misiniz? (Sahip olduğunuz çocuk sayısı üçten azsa bu soruyu atlayabilirsiniz)

1 (çok huzursuz/çok çatışmalı) .....2.....3.....4.....5 (çok huzurlu/çatışmasız)

22.f. Boşanma sonrasında eski eşinizle olan ilişkinizi değerlendirir misiniz?

1 (çok huzursuz/çok çatışmalı) .....2.....3.....4.....5 (çok huzurlu/çatışmasız)

22.g. Şu anda eski eşinizle olan ilişkinizi değerlendirir misiniz?

1 (çok huzursuz/çok çatışmalı) .....2.....3.....4.....5 (çok huzurlu/çatışmasız)

23. Eski eşinizle evliliğiniz sırasındaki ilişkinizi üç sıfatla tanıtmak isteseydiniz hangi üç sıfatı seçerdiniz?

24. Eski eşinizle boşanma sonrası ilişkinizi üç sıfatla tanıtmak isteseydiniz hangi üç sıfatı seçerdiniz?

25. Boşanma sonrasında çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla ilişkinizi yeniden düzenlemek için herhangi bir eğitim veya psikolojik destek aldınız mı? Belirtiniz.

- Evet, aldım.
- Hayır, almadım.

26. Boşanma öncesinde çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla olan ilişkinizi üç sıfatla tanıtmak isteseydiniz hangi üç sıfatı seçerdiniz?

27. Boşanma sonrasında çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla olan ilişkinizi üç sıfatla tanıtmak isteseydiniz hangi üç sıfatı seçerdiniz?

28. Kendi anne-babanız hayatta mı?

- Her ikisi de hayatta.
- Annemi kaybettim.
- Babamı kaybettim.
- Her ikisini de kaybettim.

29. Boşanma öncesinde yakın aile bireylerinizden herhangi bir destek aldınız mı?

- Evet, aldım.
- Hayır, almadım.

30. (Bir önceki soruya “evet” cevabını verdiyseniz) Boşanma öncesinde yakın aile bireylerinden kimlerden destek aldınız?

31. Boşanma sonrasında yakın aile bireylerinden herhangi bir destek aldınız mı?

- Evet, aldım.
- Hayır, almadım.

32. (Bir önceki soruya “evet” cevabını verdiyseniz) Boşanma sonrasında yakın aile bireylerinden kimlerden destek aldınız?

33. Yakın aile bireylerinden aldığınız desteği değerlendirir misiniz? (“0” hiç yardımcı olmadılar, “5” çok yardımcı oldular olmak üzere 1, 2, 3, 4 veya 5 seçeneğini yuvarlak içine alınız)

1 (hiç yardımcı olmadılar) .....2.....3.....4.....5 (çok yardımcı oldular)

34. Ailenizde başka boşanmış/ayrılmış çift var mı?

- Evet, var.
- Hayır, yok.

35. (Bir önceki soruya “evet” cevabını verdiyseniz) Kimler boşandı/ayrıldı?

36. Yakın arkadaş çevrenizde başka boşanmış/ayrılmış çift var mı?

- Evet, var.
- Hayır, yok.

37. Kaç kardeşiniz?

- Tek çocuğum.
- Bir kardeşim var.
- İki kardeşim var.
- İki den fazla kardeşim var.

38. Siz kaçınıcı çocuksunuz?

39. İçinde büyüdüğünüz aileyi üç sıfatla tanıtmak isteseydiniz hangi sıfatları seçerdiniz?

40. Annenizle aranızdaki ilişkiyi üç sıfatla tanıtmak isteseydiniz hangi sıfatları seçerdiniz?

41. Babanızla aranızdaki ilişkiyi üç sıfatla tanıtmak isteseydiniz hangi sıfatları seçerdiniz?

### Appendix 3. Interview Questions

#### GÖRÜŞME SORULARI

Bu görüşmede babalık deneyiminiz ve boşanmanın bu deneyiminizi nasıl etkilediği üzerine size bazı sorular soracağım. Soruların doğru ya da yanlış bir cevabı bulunmamaktadır.

- 1) “Baba olmak” sizin için ne demek? Deneyimlerinizden bahsedermisiniz?
- 2) Şimdi biraz başa dönecek olursak, baba olma sürecinizi anlatırmısınız? (Birden fazla çocuğunuz olması durumunda, her çocuk için ayrı ayrı anlatabilirsiniz)
  - a. Planlı bir hamilelik miydi?
  - b. Çocuk sahibi olmakla ilgili ne gibi hayalleriniz vardı?
  - c. Hamilelik sürecinde neler yaşadınız?
  - d. Doğum nasıldı?
  - e. Bebeğiniz doğduktan sonraki ilk yıllarda bakımına ne kadar katkınız oldu?
- 3) Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın doğumu çift ilişkinizi ne şekilde etkiledi?
- 4) Evlilik süresince baba-çocuk ilişkiniz nasıldı? Birlikte neler yapardınız?
- 5) Boşanma sürecini biraz anlatırmısınız?
- 6) Ayrılık kararının alındığı sırada çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla ilgili neler hissettiniz ve düşündünüz? Çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla ilgili olumsuz düşünceleriniz (korkularınız, kaygılarınız vb.) oldu mu?
- 7) Boşanmış bir baba olmak sizin için ne demek? Boşanmak, babalık deneyiminizi nasıl etkiledi?
- 8) Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın ayrılık sürecini nasıl deneyimlemiş olabileceğini düşünüyorsunuz?

- 9) Boşanma sonrasında yeni bir eve taşındınız mı? Taşındınızsa bu sırada çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla ilgili neler hissettiniz ve düşündünüz? Taşındığınız yeni ortamı ne gibi kriterlere bağlı olarak seçtiniz?
- 10) Bu soruya cevap vermek sizin için uygunsa, boşanma süreci sonrasında yeni bir ilişkiye başlama kararı aldınız mı? Eğer aldınızsa bu aşamada çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla ilgili neler hissettiniz ve düşündünüz? Bu kişiyi/kişileri çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla tanıştırdınızsa birliktelik başladıktan ne kadar süre sonra ve nasıl tanıştırdınız? Çocuğunuzun/çocuklarınızın tepkisi nasıl oldu?
- 11) Tekrar bir çocuk sahibi olmakla ilgili neler düşünüyorsunuz?
- 12) Çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla şu anki ilişkinizi anlatır mısınız?
- 13) Sizce şu an ben çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla konuşuyor olsam bir baba olarak sizi nasıl tanımlar(lar)dı? İlişkinizin olumlu tarafları olarak neleri söyler(ler)di? “İyi ki babam...” desem, bu cümleyi nasıl tamamlar(lar)dı?
- 14) Şimdi de tersini düşünün. Çocuğunuz/çocuklarınız nelerin daha iyi olabileceğini söyler(ler)di? “Keşke babam ...” desem, bu cümleyi nasıl tamamlar(lar)dı?
- 15) Sizin annenizle ilişkiniz nasıldı? İlişkinizin olumlu tarafları nelerdi? “İyi ki annem...” desem, siz bu cümleyi nasıl tamamlarsınız?
- 16) Annenizle olan ilişkinizde nelerin daha iyi olabileceğini düşünüyorsunuz? “Keşke annem...” desem, bu cümleyi nasıl tamamlarsınız?
- 17) Babanızla ilişkiniz nasıldı? İlişkinizin olumlu tarafları nelerdi? “İyi ki babam...” desem, siz bu cümleyi nasıl tamamlarsınız?
- 18) Peki kendi babanızla olan ilişkinizde nelerin daha iyi olabileceğini düşünüyorsunuz? “Keşke babam...” desem, bu cümleyi nasıl tamamlarsınız?
- 19) Bir parçası olduğunuz geniş ailenizi ve içinde yaşadığınız toplumsal ve kültürel yapıyı düşündüğünüzde Türkiye’de yaşayan boşanmış bir baba olmak ne demek? Ne gibi kolaylıkları ve zorlukları olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz?



- 20) Boşanma sürecinde ve sonrasında çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla ilişkinizi korumak için ne gibi şeylere ihtiyaç duydunuz? Size kim, nasıl destek oldu? Sizce bu destek yeterli miydi? Nasıl daha iyi destek olunabilirdi? Siz çocuğunuz/çocuklarınız için neleri daha iyi yapabiliydiniz?
- 21) Çocuğunuzla/çocuklarınızla ilgili ne gibi hayalleriniz ve beklentileriniz var?
- 22) Gelecekte baba-çocuk ilişki(leri)nizin nasıl olmasını istersiniz? Bunun gerçekleşmesi için nelere ihtiyacınız var? Kendinizden ve diğerlerinden beklentileriniz neler?
- 23) Konu ile ilgili eklemek istediğiniz herhangi bir şey var mı?

**ETİK KURUL DEĞERLENDİRME SONUCU/RESULT OF EVALUATION BY  
THE ETHICS COMMITTEE**

(Bu bölüm İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi İnanç Araştırmaları Etik Kurul tarafından doldurulacaktır /This section to be completed by the Committee on Ethics in research on Humans)

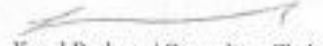
**Başvuru Sahibi / Applicant:** Sedu Doğan

**Proje Başlığı / Project:** Title Father-Child Relationships in the Post-Divorce Period: Delving into the Narratives of Divorced Fathers


**Proje No. / Project Number:** 2019-20024-58

1.	Herhangi bir değişikliğe gerek yoktur / There is no need for revision	XX
2.	Ret/ Application Rejected Reddin gerekçesi / Reason for Rejection	

**Değerlendirme Tarihi / Date of Evaluation:** 9 Nisan 2019

  
Kurul Başkanı / Committee Chair


Doç. Dr. İtir Erhart

  
Üye / Committee Member

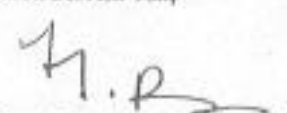
Prof. Dr. Turgut Tarhanlı

  
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Prof. Dr. Koray Akay

  
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Prof. Dr. Aslı Tunç

  
Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Hale Bolak Boratav