

Contacts between Divorced and Non-Divorced Parents and Their Adult Children in the Netherlands: An Investment Perspective*

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This article addresses descriptive and explanatory research questions on the contact frequency between divorced parents and their adult children. The survey Divorce in the Netherlands 1998 has data on the contact frequency between 803 divorced respondents and 214 non-divorced parents and 2,122 non-resident children older than 18 years. The data show that divorced fathers have less contact with their adult children than fathers who did not divorce; for mothers the effects of divorce is small. To explain the lower contact frequency of fathers when compared with mothers, as well as the variation in contact frequency among divorced fathers, we use an investment perspective. We identify five investment factors: involvement in parenting during the marriage, the custody arrangement, pre- and post-divorce conflicts, alimony payments, and (not) starting a new family. About half of the effect of divorce on the contact frequency between fathers and adult children can be explained by the custody arrangement. Within the divorced, both the custody arrangement and remarriage explain the contact frequency, and the effects are equal for divorced fathers and mothers. We find only limited evidence that the involvement in parenting during the marriage, parental conflict, and the observance of alimony payment have direct effects on the contact frequency between divorced parents and their adult children.

Introduction

In this article, we address the consequences of divorce for the contacts parents have with their adult children.

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Many studies on the consequences of divorce for the relationship between parents and children have focused on the short-term outcomes. This line of research is strongly related to the custody arrangement (Furstenberg and Winquist, 1985; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Seltzer, 1991; Stewart, 1999; Kalmijn and de Graaf, 2000), and has shown that many divorced fathers have little contact with their children in the period after the divorce. About a

fifth of the divorced fathers loose contact with their children completely. In most cases, the mother obtains custody over minor children, which makes that the frequency of daily interaction between mother and child hardly changes after the divorce. Alternative custodial arrangements, in which the father becomes the custodial parent after the divorce or in which the parents choose to be co-parents, are found to be relatively scarce. Apparently, the current practice of custody arrangements puts the post-divorce relationship between fathers and children under pressure.

Other research has shown that divorce also affects the contact frequency between parents and children later in life, when the children have become adults and have started to live independently (Seltzer, 1991; Booth and Amato, 1994; Cooney, 1994; Shapiro and Lambert, 1999; Fokkema *et al.*, 2003; Shapiro, 2003). The American data show that especially the contact between fathers and their adult children is affected by divorce. An important line of research is concerned with the consequences of divorce on the parent-child relationship in the very long term, when the parents need the support of their children in their old age (Cooney and Uhlenberg, 1990; Dykstra, 1998; Miller *et al.*, 1998). This research shows that older parents who need care can rely less on the assistance of their children when they have experienced a divorce. This holds both for divorced mothers and for divorced fathers, but more so for fathers.

Given the above studies, the most straightforward conclusion is that divorce is accompanied by high parental costs in both the shorter and longer term, and especially for fathers. Researchers studying the determinants of divorce hypothesize that fathers who are involved in the upbringing of their children will be less likely to divorce because for them the loss of parenting produces higher costs (Kalmijn, 1999; Poortman and Seltzer, 2005). It is questionable, however, whether involved fathers indeed will loose much of the parenting when the marriage does dissolve, and, even if they are not involved in the parenting, whether in the long run the contacts will not be re-established. Divorced fathers who do not get custody but did highly *invest* in caring and parenting activities during the marriage, may convey to their children that they are committed to the responsibilities of parenthood and that they are dedicated to them. Once away from mother's wings, it is not unlikely that these children will intensify the contact with their father. Moreover, *post-divorce investments* in parental responsibilities may also strengthen or recover the contact of fathers and mothers with their children.

The aim of this article is to determine the impact of earlier parent's investments on the frequency of contact they have with their adult children. We will address three explanatory questions. The first question is why divorced parents have less contact with their adult children than non-divorced parents; the second one is why divorced fathers have less contact with their adult children than divorced mothers; and the third explanatory question is why some divorced fathers and mothers have more contact with their adult children than other divorced fathers and mothers. Our theoretical starting point to answer these questions is that the more the parents have invested in the quality of their relationship with their children, the more contacts they will have with their children when these have become adults. We will study the impact of five investment factors: (a) the involvement in parenting when the family was intact, (b) the custody arrangement after the divorce, (c) the avoidance of escalating conflicts during and after the divorce process, (d) the observance of alimony payments, and (e) *not* starting a new family after divorce. The first and second investment factors will be used to explain the difference between divorced and non-divorced parents, and all five investment factors will be used to explain the difference between divorced fathers and divorced mothers.

It is important to emphasize that the study of the impact of pre- and post-divorce investments in parental responsibilities on the contacts between parents and adult children is not just of academic interest. A better insight into this issue is also very important to enhance knowledge in the consequences of divorced fathering and mothering. It is well-known that low parent-child contact in general and father or mother absence in particular has negative effects on children's well-being and life chances (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Amato, 2001; Fischer, 2004), and it is important to know the long-term consequences of divorce on inter-generational relationships.

In this contribution, we will analyse a rich data set with information on the contacts between 803 divorced (single and remarried) and 214 non-divorced parents and all their independently living adult children (2,122), which allows us to investigate to what extent the contact frequency is the consequence of earlier parental investments in the relationship.

Hypotheses

In general, keeping contact with other persons over the life-course, whether these others are relatives, friends,

or acquaintances, requires not only lasting affection, but also continuous investment of time and energy. Although the relationship between parents and their adult children is unique and differs from the relationship between friends in several respects, literature about determinants of social interaction is useful as a starting point for our purpose (Dykstra, 1990; Bedford and Blieszner, 2000; Terhell, 2004). The primary idea we borrow from this literature is that prior investments affect the contact frequency between parents and adult children, just as they affect contact between friends. The most important element of this idea is that exchange of affective, personal, and instrumental support is necessary to warrant the continuation of contact. We apply this idea to the explanation of the variation in the number of contacts between divorced and non-divorced parents with their adult children, and distinguish between five types of investments.

(a) The first type of investment concerns the degree of the parent's involvement in caring and parenting tasks (Kalmijn and de Graaf, 2000). The attention, commitment, and time that parents invest in their children appear to be invaluable in the longer term. Adult children appreciate the commitment and involvement of their parents, or, the other way around, adult children may look back with grief on the attention experienced during their upbringing. It is likely that the experience of commitment, consciously or unconsciously, has a positive influence on contacts in adult life. The parent who did the greatest part of the parental tasks will probably have a closer relationship with adult children, especially because he or she is more familiar with the children. Just as in the cases of friendship, a bond emerges that will not easily be weakened or violated by events in later life. We expect that divorced fathers and mothers have more contact with their children if they fulfilled a relatively large portion of the caring and upbringing tasks during the marriage.

(b) The second type investment we look at is the custody arrangement after divorce (Seltzer, 1991). The most common arrangement is that one of the parents is given the custody of the children (the so-called resident parent, often the mother) and that the visiting rights and duties of the other parent (the so-called non-resident parent) are established in the arrangements concerning parental access (Fox and Kelly, 1995; Cancian and Meyer, 1998). The resident parent automatically keeps intensive involvement regarding further development of the children, which usually results in a strengthening of the relationship. Although the arrangements concerning parental access aim to make that the non-resident parent keeps in touch with

the children, the variation in the frequency of visits is large (Kalmijn and de Graaf, 2000). We expect that contact of ever-divorced fathers and mothers with their adult children is higher when they were resident parent after separation, and that the contact frequency will be higher for non-resident parents with a higher frequency of visits when the child was minor.

(c) The third type of investment has to do with the parental conflicts that occurred during the divorce process and in the period right after it (Fischer *et al.*, 2005). Studies show that moderate to high levels of parental conflicts are not uncommon, and the conflicts are often related to visitation issues (King and Heard, 1999) and to boundary ambiguity (Madden-Derdich *et al.*, 1999). Furthermore, consensus exists that parental conflicts may have a negative impact on children's emotional and social development. This holds especially when parents express their conflicts directly with and through the children. In these circumstances, children feel caught in the middle and left out of the process. When parents have the ability to set aside inter-parental conflicts, on the other hand, it conveys to children that their parents are committed to them and it provides emotional stability. Therefore, attempts to maximize agreement and to avoid hostility can be seen as an investment in the emotional well-being of the children. We hypothesize that if parents are able to handle the precarious situation of a marital disruption in a harmonious way, this will be highly appreciated by the children, consciously or not, and that this will translate in more contact later on. We distinguish two aspects of parental divorce conflicts. First, there are the conflicts that have to do with the divorce process itself and the way parents handle these. Some divorcees make the divorce process easy and others fight with each other all over the procedure. Second, there are the post-divorce conflicts. Some parents develop a harmonious relationship whereas others do not work together. We expect that the impact of parental conflict will be stronger for the non-resident parent, since an antagonistic relationship especially will have a negative influence on the visitation between non-resident parents and their children.

(d) The fourth type of investment is the alimony arrangement and the observance of paying it. For the non-resident parent, the alimony arrangement enlarges the opportunities to demonstrate high concern about and regard for his or her children. Reversely, by not observing the alimony arrangement, the non-resident parent shows that he or she has not much interest in the responsibility of the financial well-being of the children, which may have long-term negative effects

for the contact frequency with the adult children. Although in general a court-ordered arrangement mandates that a certain amount has to be paid by the non-custodial parent to the custodial parent in support of the child, evidence shows that many non-custodial parents fail to financially support their children (Peterson and Nord, 1990; Sorensen, 1997).

(e) The fifth type of investment concerns whether or not the divorced parent starts a new relationship. The relationship between parents and child can be disturbed, especially when the non-custodial parent remarries or enters into a new consensual union (Smyth *et al.*, 2004). The entrance of a new, and possibly unwelcome, adult into the family can be a source of stress and rivalry for the children (Hetherington and Camara, 1988). The attention and time of the divorced parent will be spent on the new relationship. In general, children may feel that they are put into second place, and that the new partner is more important to their father or mother (Simons, 1980). Furthermore, the contact can get worse because of feelings of betrayal towards the other parent and the family in general. Even if divorced parents have made very clear to their children that they will never be a family again, many children still nurse the hope that the relationship between their parents will improve. Entering into a new relationship by one of both parents, increases their fear that this will never happen. It is obvious that further contact between a remarried parent and child will highly depend on the behaviour and attitude of the new partner. Therefore, we expect that the contact of ever-divorced fathers and mothers with their adult children is higher when they have not started a new relationship. Just as with regard to the level of divorce conflicts, we think that the effect of remarriage is especially large for the non-residential parent.

It is important to note that the first two investment factors — parent's involvement in parenting and the custody arrangement — can contribute to the explanation of the effect of divorce on the contact frequency between parents and their adult children, whereas the other three factors refer to differences within the group of divorced parents. Parental conflict, payment of alimony, and remarriage are irrelevant variables for non-divorced parents. The custody arrangement can be included in the analysis that compares divorced and non-divorced parents, since all non-divorced parents can be included in one category with residential divorced parents.

In our analysis, we will also investigate to what extent the effects of involvement in parenting and

the alimony arrangement on the contact frequency are direct, and to what extent these effects are indirect. Highly involved fathers are more likely to get (joint) custody and their children may feel a stronger need to visit their non-resident father frequently (Arditti and Keith, 1993). Kalmijn and De Graaf (2000) have shown that the involvement in parenting is the most important predictor variable of the custody arrangement. The odds that the father becomes the residential parent is 2.2 as high when fathers who score one standard deviation above the mean of a scale of parental involvement are compared with fathers who score one standard deviation below the mean. In addition, fathers who were highly involved with their children during the marriage have greater desire to pay their child support, and children of those fathers are more likely to visit their non-residential father frequently (Seltzer *et al.*, 1989; Seltzer, 1991; Stewart, 1999; Koball and Principe, 2002). These findings suggest an indirect relationship, but there might be a direct effect of involvement in parenting and alimony arrangement as well, which has to be established empirically.

Finally, it is worth noting that this study will not address the issue to what extent parent's investment is restricted by factors out of their control. In this respect, family researchers study the 'gatekeeping' role that mothers play, i.e. mothers' preferences and attempts to restrict and exclude fathers from child care and involvement with children (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Madden-Derdich and Leonard, 2000). They found that wives who still believe in the traditional role of mothers in providing primary care to their children and who perceive men's domestic standards to be unsatisfying are likely to exclude their husbands from becoming involved in parenting activities at all (Fagan and Barnett, 2003). Maternal gatekeeping does not only take place during the marriage. Evidence is found that also after marital dissolution, father's level of involvement in the child's life is partly determined by the extent to which mothers permit participation (Parke, 1996; Cummings and O'Reilly, 1997; Braver and O'Connell, 1998; Doherty *et al.*, 1998; Madden-Derdich and Leonard, 2000). Custodial mothers sometimes restrict access of their children to their father or even prevent any visitation because they are angry with their former spouse, because they feel that the father has opted out of responsibility for his children, or because they see little value in the father's continued role (Greif, 1997; Braver and O'Connell, 1998; Braver and Griffin, 2000).

Data

We use data from the survey *Divorce in the Netherlands 1998* (Kalmijn *et al.*, 2000). The sample for this survey was drawn from 19 municipalities which are representative of the Dutch population with respect to region, urbanization, and political party preference. Three random samples were drawn: (a) first-married, (b) divorcees who had not remarried, and (c) divorcees who had remarried. Sample (b) includes persons who were cohabiting at the time of the survey. The divorces of the latter two groups did not necessarily relate to the dissolution of a *first* marriage. The divorces included in the study took place during a long period of time: 1949–1998, which means that for some people their marriage fell apart longer ago than for others. In total, 2,346 respondents participated in the survey: 551 respondents in their first marriage, 868 ever-divorced respondents living without a partner at the time of the survey, and 927 ever-divorced respondents who had remarried or entered into a new consensual union. We refer to the three groups as non-divorced (or first-married), divorced-not remarried, and divorced-remarried, respectively. All respondents were interviewed at home using structured questionnaires. The participation rate of the survey was 58 per cent and this rate was equal for the three marital status groups (Kalmijn *et al.*, 2000).

Respondents reported the current contact frequencies with those non-resident children of whom they and their spouse (first-married) or ex-spouse (divorced) are the biological parents. For this article, we selected those respondents who have at least one non-resident biological child older than 18 years. We have information on 1,017 respondents who have reported on 2,122 adult children; the average is 2.09 children per respondent. There are 214 first-married respondents with 492 adult children (average is 2.30), and 803 divorced respondents with 1,630 adult children (average is 2.03 children).

Measurement

The *frequency of contact* between the respondent and his or her adult children is the dependent variable in all analyses. The question pertains to all children who were not living with the respondent at the time of the survey. The structured question has eight possible answers, ordered from less than one contact a year to daily contact. The question refers to all kinds of contacts, the most common of which will be personal (visits) and telephone contacts. We experimented

extensively with alternate quantifications of this variable and decided to use the following recoding scheme: less than one contact last year (0), one contact yearly (1), several contacts yearly (4), monthly contact (10), two or three contacts monthly (25), weekly contact (50), several contacts weekly (100), and daily contact (200). Other recoding schemes and logarithmic transformations of the contact frequencies do hardly affect the outcomes of our analysis. To explore the validity of our coding scheme, we have also estimated ordered logistic regression models, and the very similar results again reassure us that the chosen scheme is appropriate. Descriptive information on the contact frequency and on all independent (predictor) variables is displayed in Table 1, separately for non-divorced and divorced fathers and mothers.

The *divorce status* is included in the analysis by distinguishing four categories: no divorce, divorce before child's age 12, divorce between child's age 12 and 18, and divorce after child's age 18 (including age 18). Note that the longer a child has lived with both parents, the more time the parents have had to invest in the relationship with the child, so the age at divorce could be interpreted as an investment factor as well. The hypothesis would run that the older the child was when the parents divorced, the higher the contact frequency will be.

Investment Factors

The five investment factors are measured in the following way:

1. The respondent's *involvement in parenting* during the marriage is measured in a relative way; no information was available about the absolute contribution of the respondent. For four activities (reading and playing, transport to school and clubs, talking about school or behavioural problems, and taking the child to events like shows or zoos), the respondent was asked how regular he or she did this activity much less often, less often, equally often, more often, or much more often than his or her spouse (first-married) or ex-spouse (divorced) when their joint children grew up (scores running from 0 to 4). The scale is a sum of the four answers, and ranges from 0 to 16. The higher the score on this scale, the more involvement of the respondent in the child's caring and upbringing. The average score is 6.29 for fathers and 12.83 for mothers. Since the sum is higher than 16 (the average is 9.86), it seems that respondents overestimate their contribution. We standardized the scale to facilitate the interpretation of the effects.

The retrospective design of the questions about involvement in parenting might raise doubts about the validity of this measure. Especially in the case of older respondents, it is questionable whether they remember their involvement in parenting correctly. However, as the focus is on aspects of childrearing that involve behaviour and not psychological components like emotional support and affection, we believe that the questions yield accurate answers.

2. We have detailed information on *the custodial arrangement* after divorce. We combined the information on who was the custodial parent and the number of visits by the children to the non-resident parent in seven categories: (a) the respondent was the custodial parent, (b) the respondent and the ex-spouse shared

the fostering (co-parenting), (c) the ex-spouse was the custodial parent and there were weekly visits, (d) the ex-spouse was the custodial parent and there were visits, but less than weekly, (e) the ex-spouse was the custodial parent and there were no visits by the child to the non-resident parent, (f) there was another custodial parent (foster-parents, children's home), and (g) there was no custodial parent since the child was living independently at the time of its parents' divorce or started to live independently immediately after the divorce. The last category does not completely coincide with a divorce after the child's age 18, since 26 children younger than 18 started to live independently after their parents' divorce. We have no information about their living arrangement, but suppose they were living

Table 1 Descriptive statistics: means of all independent variables

	Fathers		Mothers	
	Not Divorced	Divorced	Not Divorced	Divorced
Yearly contacts	93.90	37.06	79.71	73.51
Age child at divorce				
No divorce	1.00		1.00	
Divorce before age 12 years		0.40		0.34
Divorce between age 12 and 18 years		0.27		0.27
Divorce after age 18 years		0.33		0.39
Explanatory investment variables				
Involvement in parenting (standardized)	-1.01	-0.75	0.43	0.75
Custody arrangement:				
Respondent is custodial parent	1.00	0.14	1.00	0.60
Joint custody arrangement		0.02		0.02
Ex is custodial parent, weekly visits by children		0.17		0.05
Ex is custodial parent, some visits by children		0.28		0.01
Ex is custodial parent, no visits by children		0.14		0.02
Other custody arrangement		0.04		0.05
No custody after divorce		0.20		0.22
Post-divorce conflicts (standardized)		-0.10		0.08
Divorce motive: violence		0.07		0.00 ^a
Divorce motive: affair		0.36		0.17
Paid alimony for children		0.43		0.02
Remarriage:				
Not remarried		0.45		0.64
Remarried without children		0.41		0.31
Remarried with children		0.14		0.05
Control variables				
Parent's age (36-85)	60.93	58.59	59.79	56.75
Parent's education (1:low to 7:high)	3.58	4.35	3.16	3.53
Parent's health status (1:very good to 5:very bad)	3.49	3.67	3.66	3.59
Child's gender (0 = man, 1 = woman)	0.52	0.51	0.54	0.51
Travel distance in hours (0-14)	0.59	0.84	0.82	0.77
Missing travel distance	0.03	0.10	0.04	0.04
Number of adult children	245	718	247	912
Number of parents	105	341	109	462

Note: Means are computed on samples of adult children.

^aBy assumption, see text.

under close surveillance. The data show that, when the child was not living independently after divorce, in most cases the mother became the custodial parent. Only 14 per cent of the divorced fathers and 8 per cent of the divorced mothers has indicated that the father was the custodial parent. In about 25 per cent of the cases, neither the respondent nor his or her former spouse was the custodial parent. Most of these cases refer to children who were already adults at the moment of their parents' divorce. It is clear that joint custody did not occur often in this period. For some explanatory analyses, we have coded all first-married respondents into category 1: the respondent was the custodial parent.

3. *Parental conflict* is measured in two ways. First, we have constructed a scale that summarizes conflicts during the divorce procedure and conflicts between the parents after they have started to live independently of each other. We have also experimented with separate scales for these two types of conflict, but this did not lead to clearer results. This scale contains eight conflict items during the divorce procedure on housing and furniture, pension, debts and savings, alimony and arrangements concerning the children (1 = very often or several times; 0 = a few times or never) and 15 conflict items after the divorce on gossiping and other types of verbal harassment, unwelcome contact, aggressive behaviour, and domain-specific issues (1 = ever happened; 0 = never happened). Second, we look at divorce motives that potentially harm the parent-child relationship the most: adultery and physical violence. Children may blame the parent who hurt the other parent during the marriage, and persistence in this blame may lead to less contact later. Children may feel betrayed if their father or mother has a new partner: 36 per cent of the divorced fathers and 17 per cent of the divorced mothers report that unfaithfulness or a new relationship was one of the reasons to divorce. Violence as a divorce motive is a very sensitive issue, and therefore the respondents were not asked whether they themselves had been violent during the marriage. Instead, they were asked whether violence had been an important divorce motive. Since it is likely that violence in marriage more often refers to violence by men than by women, we assume that reported violence refers to men only. This procedure leads to the figures in Table 1: 0 per cent of the ever-divorced women and 7 per cent of the ever-divorced men have been violent during marriage.

4. The observance of *alimony payments* has been measured straightforwardly: the respondents were asked whether the non-resident parent did pay alimony for the child in the period after the divorce.

If the non-resident parent did not have to pay alimony, which is the case if his or her income is too low, this dummy indicator has been coded zero. Almost half of the divorced fathers and almost no divorced mothers have paid alimony for their children.

5. Between the year of divorce and the year of the survey, 42 per cent of the fathers and 28 per cent of the mothers have started to cohabit with a new partner, married or unmarried. We have also information on children born in these new relationships: 11 per cent of all divorced fathers and 4 per cent of all divorced mothers did have children in the new relationship.

Control Variables

We include several control variables in the analysis. The parent's age and health may affect the relationship in various ways. The contact frequency may increase when the parent needs support, especially when they become older and experience health problems. It is also possible, however, that old and disabled parents do not have the opportunity to have regular contact with their children. The *age* of the respondents varies between 36 and 85 years. The *health status* of the respondent is measured subjectively and ranges from 1 (very good) to 5 (very bad).

With regard to the inclusion of parent's age in the models, it is important to note that it is very well possible to interpret its effect as a cohort or period effect. European countries have been faced with major changes in the family system during the second part of the last century. Over time, female labour force participation has increased strongly and the division of labour in the household has become less unequal. Modest but continuing increased changes can be found in the amount of time husbands spend with their children (Van der Lippe and Niphuis-Nell, 1994). In addition, several significant transformations in divorce legislation have taken place. One of the most important changes in the Netherlands, for instance, was the liberalization of the Divorce Act in 1971 (Van Poppel and Beets, 1998). If both parties sign a petition declaring that they think the marriage had broken down irreversibly, divorce is granted automatically,¹ resulting in a normalization of divorce in Dutch society. More recently, significant changes in custody laws can be found, most importantly by replacing the prior maternal preference standard for children of 'tender years' with a gender-neutral 'child's best interest' standard. In the Netherlands, for instance, both parents retain custody over the children by law since 1998. Because of these changes and the wide age

range in our data set (36–85 years), the possible negative effect of age we will find might rather be a cohort effect (parents from younger cohorts are more inclined to maintain contact with their children than older cohorts) than a downward life-course development in contact frequency. However, this problem is likely to be small in our study as most of the potentially disturbing characteristics, especially the five investment factors, are included in our multivariate models. In addition, further analyses show that there are no significant interaction effects between the parent's age² and the five investment factors.

Many studies on family contacts have shown that the higher-educated have less contact with family members than lower-educated (Lawton *et al.*, 1994; Greenwell and Bengtson, 1997;). Respondent's *educational attainment* is measured on a scale from 1 to 7: 1. primary education, 2. lower level vocational training, 3. lower level secondary general education, 4. middle level vocational training, 5. higher level secondary general education, 6. higher level vocational training, and 7. academic education.

The *gender* of respondent and child are both coded as 0 (male) and 1 (female). The research literature shows that female family members have more frequent contact than male family members (Kulis, 1987; Spitz and Logan, 1991). We will see whether this holds for parent–child relationships in the Netherlands after a parental divorce.

The final control variable concerns the *geographical distance* between parent and child. From past studies, it turns out that this variable is a strong determinant of the frequency of parent–child contact: the closer the child's place of residence, the more opportunities of having contact, resulting in a higher contact frequency (Cooksey and Craig, 1998; Stewart, 1999). The respondents were asked how long it takes to get from their home to where their child is living. The variable ranges from 0 minutes (neighbours) to 14 hours. The average travel distance is the lowest for non-divorced fathers (35 minutes) and the highest for divorced fathers (50 minutes). In 3 (non-divorced fathers) to 10 (divorced fathers) per cent of the cases, no information is available on the travel distance. Because it is likely that not knowing the travel distance is highly correlated with no contact at all, we used mean substitution for these cases and constructed an extra dummy variable when information about the travel distance was missing.

Further, we have looked at three standard variables which predict divorce: Caribbean descent, parental divorce (i.e. the grandparents of the adult children), and religious domination. None of these variables has

a significant effect on the contact frequency between parents and their adult children, so for reasons of parsimony we have not included them in our analysis.

Apart from the child's gender, no other socio-demographic characteristics of the child are included in the explanatory models. The questionnaire contained only a few questions about all children of the respondent, and only about the oldest child, some demographic questions were asked (educational attainment, age of leaving home, marital status). We did not include the child's age in the analysis since the association between the respondent's age and the child's age is too large ($r=0.81$) to allow the estimation of both effects simultaneously.

Models

The data set has a hierarchical structure: since fathers and mothers may have more than one adult child, the children are 'nested' within fathers or mothers. The dependent variable — the frequency of parent–child contact — the variance of which we attempt to explain is measured separately for each adult child. The independent variables, on the other hand, are measured either at the level of each child or at the level of the father or mother. Traditional regression methods cannot be used to analyse this type of data without introducing dependency and covariance between observations sharing the same context (i.e. adult children with the same father or mother). In order to correct the biased standard errors, we used the *cluster* option in the Stata software (StataCorp, 2003). This procedure provides the correct (larger) standard errors of the regression effects in the models.

Results

In Table 2, we report the average contact frequencies between adult sons and daughters and their parents. The table shows that divorced fathers have much less contact with their adult children than non-divorced fathers, while divorce has a small impact on the contact frequency between mothers and their adult children. Divorced fathers on average have 40 contacts each year with their adult son and 34 contacts with their adult daughters, whereas fathers in their first marriages report 88 contacts with their sons and 99 contacts with their daughters. For mothers, divorce only affects the number of contacts with sons, but not the number of contacts with daughters. There is a striking difference in the proportions of fathers and mothers who have lost all contact with their children.

While the complete absence of contacts with adult children does hardly happen to the non-divorced parents or to the divorced mothers, it happens to 18 per cent of the divorced fathers.

The table further shows that fathers in their first marriage report somewhat higher levels of contact with their adult children than first-married mothers report; this difference is statistically significant ($P=0.02$). Many studies have found that women have more family contacts than men (Kulis, 1987; Spitze and Logan, 1991). We think that most contacts reported by our sample refer to contacts fathers and mothers together have with their adult children. There is some evidence that wives are better reporters than husbands (Walker and McGraw, 2000; Mizell, 2002), but we propose not to make too much of the reported differences. We think it is more important to conclude that non-divorced fathers do not have fewer contacts with their adult children than non-divorced mothers.

In Table 3, we show to what extent the differences in annual contact frequency between parents who divorced and parents who have not divorced, are due to differences in the involvement in parenting and to differences in the custodial arrangement after divorce. Model 1 is the baseline model: it shows (like Table 1) that the difference in annual contacts between divorced and non-divorced parents is much larger for fathers than for mothers: 16 per cent of the variance in contact frequency was explained among fathers, compared with only 2 per cent among mothers. In addition, it shows that the age of the child at the moment of divorce does not make a big difference

for the contact frequency. With respect to mothers, only those who divorced after child's age 18 have significantly less contact with their adult children compared with non-divorced mothers. This is probably due to the greater autonomy of children older than 18 years.

In Model 2, which includes the control variables, these differences hardly change. The effects of control variables are comparable for fathers and mothers. Only the effect of the child's gender is different for fathers and mothers. Daughters and sons have the same number of contacts with their fathers, but daughters clearly have more contact with their mothers than sons do. Educational attainment has a clear negative effect; if we compare respondents with the lowest and highest levels of education, the predicted difference in annual contact frequency is about 19 contacts ($6 \times 3.21 = 19.26$ for fathers, and $6 \times 2.95 = 17.70$ for mothers). The health status of the parent has a significant effect for fathers only, although the effects do not differ for fathers and mothers. Apparently, unhealthy parents have less opportunity to maintain frequent contacts with their adult children. The same mechanism seems to work with regard to parent's age and travel distance. For each year, the father or mother becomes older, the annual number of contacts drops with 0.64 contacts for fathers and with 0.92 contacts for mothers. A travel distance of one extra hour means a reduction of about 9 contacts (8.54 for fathers and 10.13 for mothers) per year. In addition, as expected, fathers and mothers who do not have a clue how far away they live from their adult children, have much

Table 2 Contact frequency between adult sons and daughters and their parents

	Fathers		Mothers	
	Not Divorced	Divorced	Not Divorced	Divorced
Contacts with sons				
Weekly	75.4%	34.1%	68.1%	55.6%
Monthly	22.0%	32.1%	26.5%	27.7%
Yearly	2.5%	14.8%	2.7%	10.7%
No contacts last year	0.0%	19.0%	2.7%	6.0%
Average number of contacts per year	88.1	39.9	73.4	60.5
Contacts with daughters				
Weekly	78.7%	30.9%	76.9%	75.2%
Monthly	18.9%	38.0%	17.9%	13.8%
Yearly	1.6%	13.1%	4.5%	5.0%
No contacts last year	0.8%	18.0%	0.7%	6.0%
Average number of contacts per year	99.3	34.4	85.0	86.1
Number of adult children	245	718	247	912
Number of parents	105	341	109	462

Note: Means computed on samples of adult children.

Table 3 The effects of divorce and investment on yearly contacts between parents and adult children

	Fathers			Mothers			Difference significance (3)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	
Age child at divorce (reference = no divorce)							
Divorce before age 12 years	-58.32*	-51.38*	-28.65*	8.19	1.86	0.58	**
Divorce between age 12 and 18 years	-56.82*	-52.88*	-32.31*	-9.36	-11.50***	-9.29	**
Divorce after age 18 years	-52.80*	-46.75*	-21.98*	-16.41**	-13.60**	-8.18	
Involvement in parenting (standardized)			-2.39			9.07**	**
Custody arrangement (reference = respondent is custodial parent) ^a							
Joint custody arrangement			2.16			-3.51	
Ex is custodial parent			-27.33*			-31.91*	
Other custody arrangement			-23.27**			-6.89	
No custody after divorce			-30.62*			-9.79	***
Parent's age (36–85)		-0.64**	-0.68**		-0.92*	-1.02*	
Parent's education (1:low to 7:high)		-3.21*	-2.60**		-2.95*	-2.89**	
Parent's health status (1:very good to 5:very bad)		-4.40**	-4.26***		-0.74	-0.82	
Child's gender (0 = man, 1 = woman)		-1.81	-1.25		22.15*	21.81*	*
Travel distance in hours (0–14)		-8.54*	-8.10*		-10.13*	-10.22*	
Missing travel distance		-29.92*	-29.31*		-45.12*	-42.27*	
Constant	93.22	166.04	162.85	79.71	145.05	147.60	
Adjusted R ²	16.4%	23.9%	25.8%	2.2%	13.2%	15.3%	
Number of adult children		963			1159		
Number of parents		446			571		

Note: Standard errors are corrected for clustered observations within families.

* $P < 0.01$, ** $P < 0.05$, *** $P < 0.10$.

^aincluding not divorced parents.

less contact than those who do know the travel distance.

Model 3 in Table 3 adds the first two types of investments to the model: involvement in parenting during the marriage and the custody arrangement. The involvement in parenting does not affect the contact frequency between fathers and adult children, but it has an effect on the contact frequency between mothers and adult children. This difference is statistically significant, suggesting that fathers are not rewarded (or punished) for their (lack of) involvement in parenting during the marriage, whereas mothers are. We noted already that earlier research (using the same data) has shown that father's involvement in parenting has strong effects on the father becoming the custodial parent (Kalmijn and de Graaf, 2000). Apparently, the effect of involvement in parenting on contacts with their adult children is indirect for fathers, and runs via the custody arrangement. Model 3 shows that the custody arrangement itself has strong effects on the contact frequency, both for the contacts with fathers and for the contacts with mothers. The effects tell a believable story: the respondent who was the custodial parent after the divorce and respondents who had joint custody together with the ex-spouse have the highest average number of annual contacts, whereas respondents of which the ex-spouse was the custodial parent have the lowest average number of annual contacts. A joint custody arrangement after divorce functions rather well, that is when we evaluate the quality of this arrangement by the number of contacts later in life. When the child lived independently already, or when there were other fosterers than the parents, the average annual contact frequency for fathers is almost as low as when the ex-spouse became the custodial parent after the divorce. For mothers, these effects are also negative and strong, but not statistically significant, what is certainly due to the low number of cases.

Both for fathers and mothers, about half of the effects of divorce on the contact frequency are explained by the custody arrangement. But whereas for mothers the remaining effects of divorce are insignificant, they are still strong for fathers. Therefore, we continue the explanatory analysis by focusing on variation within the group of divorced parents. In this analysis, we can include parental conflict, the payment of alimony for the children, and (not) starting a new family, and thus we can test whether the difference between fathers and mothers can be explained by these factors. Table 4 displays the relevant regression models.

Model 1 of Table 4 again shows that there is a large difference in the average contact frequency of divorced

fathers and mothers with their adult children. Divorced mothers on average have 31 more annual visits than divorced fathers, when all control variables are in the model. In Models 2–4, the five investment factors enter the regression equation. First, we observe that the effect of involvement in parenting on the contact frequency between divorced parents and their adult children again is significant only for the mothers. The contact frequency of divorced fathers is not affected by their contribution to parenting at all. Second, the custody arrangement has an important effect on the contact frequency. The big divide is between the parents who were the custodial parent after the divorce and parents who were not (including parents of children who were old enough to live independently after divorce). Third, parental conflicts during and after the divorce have an effect on the number of contacts, although the effect is not strong and hardly significant. Parents whose score on the conflict scale is two standard deviations below the average have about 10 more annual contacts with their adult children than parents who score two standard deviations above the mean. The two divorce motives of which we theorized that they would have an impact of the children's feelings towards their parents do not strongly affect the contact frequency between divorced parents and their adult children. Fourth, having paid alimony does not affect the number of contacts between divorced fathers and mothers and their adult children. Fifth, remarriage has a negative effect on the contact frequency, especially for divorced mothers. Having new children after remarriage does not add much to this negative effect. Together, the investment factors explain about 60 per cent of the original difference between divorced fathers and mothers. In the discussion, we will return to this issue.

We conclude the analysis by reporting on two interaction effects we had hypotheses about. We theorized that the effect of parental conflicts and remarriage would be stronger for the non-residential parent. Although the effects of both interaction terms have the right sign, both of them are statistically insignificant ($P > 0.10$), so we conclude that the hypotheses are not supported.

Conclusions and Discussion

Past divorce research has consistently found that fathers' contacts with their children are more likely to suffer negative consequences of divorce than mothers' contacts, but hardly any study tests

explanations for this important difference. Furthermore, no detailed research is carried out on the determinants of post-divorce contact, so that possible within-group heterogeneity remains invisible. Our starting point was that investments by the parents are necessary to keep in (close) contact with the children. Five types of investments were distinguished, corresponding to different moments in the life of the parent and child in question: the parent's involvement in caring for and upbringing the children during the marriage, the way in which custody arrangements are arranged and fulfilled after separation, the way in which parents were able to avoid an antagonistic relationship after they have decided to separate, whether alimony was paid by the non-residential

parent, and whether the parents have become involved in a new relationship.

We have addressed three explanatory questions. The first one is, why divorced fathers and mothers have less contact with their adult children than non-divorced parents? The second question is, why divorced fathers have less contact with their adult children than divorced mothers? The final question is, why some divorced fathers and mothers do have frequent contact with their adult children while other fathers and mothers do not? These questions are answered by identifying factors that have to do with maintaining a good relationship with the children after divorce, by measuring these, and by estimating the appropriate models.

Table 4 Determinants of the number of yearly contacts between divorced parents and their adult children

	All divorced parents (1)	(2)	Divorced fathers (3)	Divorced mothers (4)	Difference significance
Parent's sex (0 = man, 1 = woman)	31.13*	11.68*			
Age child at divorce (reference = divorce before age 12 years)					
Divorce between age 12 and 18 years	-8.96**	-9.03**	-2.52	-11.30***	
Divorce after age 18 years	-8.93**	-6.46	6.11	-12.01***	**
Involvement in parenting (standardized)		3.35	-0.38	7.53**	
Custody arrangement (reference = respondent is custodial parent)					
Joint custody arrangement		-2.68	3.33	-5.11	
Ex is custodial parent, weekly visits by children		-28.59*	-30.79	-22.35**	
Ex is custodial parent, some visits by children		-31.73*	-27.97*	-55.51*	**
Ex is custodial parent, no visits by children		-18.73*	-16.68***	-24.24**	
Other custody arrangement		-15.09**	-23.22**	-8.40	
No custody after divorce		-18.41*	-30.08*	-11.25***	
Post-divorce conflicts (standardized)		-3.12 ^a	-5.08**	-2.69 ^a	
Divorce motive: violence by resp. (0 = no, 1 = yes)			-11.95***		
Divorce motive: resp. had affair (0 = no, 1 = yes)		-2.30	-6.50	0.30	
Paying alimony for children (0 = no, 1 = yes)		0.57	-2.49	2.42	
Remarriage:					
Not remarried (reference)					
Remarried without children		-9.91*	-3.61	-13.63**	
Remarried with children		-9.03	-3.97	-11.98	
Parent's age (36–85)	-0.61*	-0.86*	-0.53	-1.11*	
Parent's education (1:low to 7:high)	-2.25**	-1.80***	-1.14	-2.25**	
Parent's health status (1:very good to 5:very bad)	-0.96	-0.75	-1.28	0.65	
Child's gender (0 = man, 1 = woman)	11.05*	11.10*	-6.54***	24.31**	*
Travel distance in hours (0–14)	-8.68*	-8.55*	-7.69	-9.51*	
Missing travel distance	-39.64*	-35.49*	-29.75	-38.60*	
Constant	97.05	136.01	116.66	151.68	
Adjusted R ²	17.5%	21.1%	15.3%	15.6%	
Number of adult children	1630		718	912	
Number of parents	803		341	462	

Note: Standard errors corrected for clustered observations.

^aVariable not applicable to female respondents, see text.

* $P < 0.01$, ** $P < 0.05$, *** $P < 0.10$.

The results show that the custodial arrangement explains about half of the difference between divorced and non-divorced parents. It is important to note that this holds both for fathers and for mothers. However, even when the custody arrangement is taken into account, the absolute difference in the contact frequency between divorced and non-divorced fathers remains much larger than the absolute difference between divorced and non-divorced mothers. Since non-divorced fathers and mothers have about the same level of contact with their adult children, we must focus on the differences between divorced fathers and divorced mothers. Two investment factors prove to be important. The custodial arrangement is the major explanatory variable, but also remarriage play a role, and about 60 per cent of the difference between divorced fathers and mothers is explained.

One important issue is left to be explained: Why do divorced fathers have so much less contact with their adult children, even when inequalities in the custody arrangement and in remarriage have been taken into account? One consideration that comes to mind is that men need their wives to maintain contact with their adult children. When married, men have just as much contact with their children as their wives, and it is plausible that men see their children together with their wives. It is important to note, that this does not mean that men take advantage of their wives. After all, it could be that some married men have more contacts with their adult children than they prefer. After a divorce, men must arrange the contacts themselves, and then the gender difference could become manifest.

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Notes

1. Prior to the enactment of this legislation, married couples could obtain a divorce only if both parties gave their consent and if they could prove the marriage had irretrievably broken down on one of the following four grounds: adultery, physical assault or ill-treatment, desertion with malicious intent of five or more years, or a prison sentence of four or more years imposed after the marriage took place. The new Act made it possible for couples to jointly petition for divorce without

having to prove any of the above grounds. The net result of the Act was that it lifted divorce out of the realms of guilt and shame.

2. To investigate the interaction effects between the age of the parent and the investment factors, we constructed the dummy variable 'born before or after 1940 (comparison of non-divorced and divorced parents) and 'divorced before or after 1985' (comparison of divorced fathers and divorced mothers), respectively.

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