

Gender Differences in the Effects of Divorce, Widowhood and Remarriage on Intergenerational Support: Does Marriage Protect Fathers?

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There are well-known gender differences in the form and content of extended family relationships. This paper examines how fathers and mothers differ in the support they receive from children and how this depends on whether the parents divorce, become widow(er)s, enter a new relationship, and have new children. The guiding hypothesis is that because women are “kinkeepers,” the position of fathers vis-à-vis mothers deteriorates outside of marriage. Analyses are based on 8,040 parent-child dyads obtained from a Dutch survey. Positive evidence is obtained for the hypothesis. Although fathers already receive less support from children than mothers while married, this difference is larger when fathers are not married. This is not only true for a divorce that occurred early in the life of the child, but also for late divorces. Moreover, during the stage of widowhood, gender differences are increased as well. Remarriage and new children have further negative effects, and these effects are also stronger for fathers than for mothers.

Introduction

For older parents, children can be an important source of social, emotional and instrumental support. The amount of support that fathers receive, however, appears to be lower than the support that mothers receive (Barrett and Lynch 1999; Silverstein and Bengtson 1997; Spitze and Logan 1989). In part, this can be attributed to the different investments that fathers and mothers make in their children when they grow up (Cooney and Uhlenberg 1990; Rossi and Rossi 1990; Spitze and Logan 1989, 1990). At the same time, however, it is sometimes argued that fathers benefit from the kinkeeping role that mothers play (Rosenthal 1985). The kinkeeping role of the mother may reduce gender differences in the reception of intergenerational support and suggests the hypothesis that marriage increases the amount of support fathers can obtain from their children.

In this paper, I test this hypothesis by examining how the support that fathers and mothers receive from children varies across later stages of the parental life course. Data are analyzed from a new survey on family relationships in the

The Netherlands Kinship Panel Study is funded by grant 480-10-009 from the Major Investments Fund of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), and by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI), Utrecht University, the University of Amsterdam and Tilburg University. Jenny Gierveld, Pearl Dykstra, reviewers and the editor of Social Forces gave helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. Direct correspondence to Matthijs Kalmijn, Tilburg University, Department of Social Cultural Sciences, P.O. Box 90153 Warandelaan 2, Building S, Room S188, 5000 LE Tilburg, Netherlands. Phone: +31 (0)13-466-2246, Fax: +31 (0)13-466-3002. E-mail: M.Kalmijn@uvt.nl.

Netherlands, the *Netherlands Kinship Panel Study* (Dykstra et al. 2004a). The data are analyzed from the perspective of adult children, and the focus is on two central aspects of intergenerational relationships: the contact that children have with their parents and the support they give to their parents.

This research seeks to more systematically address gender differences than previous studies have done. It has been shown that social contacts between fathers and children are affected more negatively by a divorce than social contacts between mothers and children (Lye 1996), but few studies have examined these differences for intergenerational support. In addition, few studies have systematically compared effects of widowhood and remarriage between fathers and mothers (Ha, Carr, Utz and Nesse 2006).

A second contribution is the examination of the parental life course in a more comprehensive fashion, including the effects of divorce, widowhood and remarriage, the addition of new children and remarriages that have been dissolved. Moreover, I compare divorces that occurred early during the marriage, when children were young, to divorces that occurred later, when children were adults. Several recent studies have looked at these aspects of the parental life course (Aquilino 1994a; Cooksey and Craig 1998; Manning and Smock 1999), but our knowledge of how the increasingly complex parental life course affects relations with children is still developing.

Hypotheses

There are many arguments about why parental life course transitions affect the support that parents receive from children (e.g., Kaufman and Uhlenberg 1998), among them are two general theoretical arguments: investments and marriage protection.

The first argument focuses on investments in children. This concept can be defined as the degree to which parents spend time and energy on their children when they are growing up (Sayer, Bianchi and Robinson 2004). Investments are made with the aim of improving the children's quality of life. They can take the form of providing instrumental help, spending social time with the child, or being emotionally involved in the life of the child. Research has shown that fathers generally invest less in children during a marriage than mothers (Harris and Morgan 1991; Kalmijn 1999). Lower investments on the part of fathers may arise from biological differences, from prevailing social arrangements in the family, and from gender differences in motivation, skills and values (Beutel and Marini 1995; Lamb 2004). In recent decades, the time fathers spend with children has increased compared to mothers (Sayer, Bianchi and Robinson 2004; Van der Lippe and Niphuis-Nell 1994). However, mothers continue to invest more time and energy in their children than do fathers (Booth and Crouter 1998; Kalmijn 1999; Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004; Van Dijk and Siegers 1996). Given the norm of reciprocity, it can be expected that the comparatively low investments of fathers in young children will, at a later age, result in fathers receiving less support from children than mothers (Cooney and Uhlenberg 1990; Rossi and Rossi 1990; Spitze and Logan 1989).

The second argument focuses on the possible protection of marriage. The argument is that fathers obtain support from their children in part through the kinkeeping role of mothers. There are several reasons for expecting this. Mothers often arrange family visits and fathers are generally present at such visits as well. In addition, children may provide assistance to their elderly father because they want to please their mother. Hence, fathers can benefit from their children without having initiated or invested in the contact. Mothers may also be actively involved in managing the relationship between father and child. For example, mothers may monitor fathers and ask the children for assistance on their behalf. In addition, mothers may try to improve the relationship that fathers have with their children when that relationship is poor. In a sense, mothers are kinkeepers, and fathers may benefit from this role (Hagestad 1986; Di Leonardo 1987; Rosenthal 1985).

What do the two general arguments imply for the effects of life course transitions on the support that fathers and mothers receive from children? To examine the role of investments and marriage protection, a comparison of divorced and married fathers is not sufficient. More conclusive evidence for the two hypotheses can be found by making a distinction in four life course situations: (a) the parents are married, (b) the parents are divorced and the divorce occurred when the children were young, (c) the parents are divorced and the divorce occurred when the children were older, and (d) one of the parents died. In each case, we are interested in the degree to which fathers and mothers differ in the support they later obtain in their life course.

When the parents are still married, the father will have invested less in the children than the mother, which should lead to less support from the children later on in the life course. This effect is counteracted, however, by the kinkeeping role of the mother. Even when the father invested little in his children, the mother still facilitated intergenerational support on his behalf. Hence, the two effects work against each other, and the gender gap in intergenerational support may be absent or small.

When the parents divorce early in the marriage, investment opportunities by the father are reduced. After divorce, fathers usually do not get custody of their children. Not living with one's children leads to a strong decline in the opportunities to invest in children. In part, this is resolved by visitation arrangements, but investments will still be lower than they would have been had there be everyday contact between father and child (Seltzer 1991). During this stage, fathers also miss the protection of the female kinkeeper. In some cases, the positive kinkeeping role may even become negative. For example, mothers may prevent the father from having contact with the child when the conflicts between ex-partners after divorce linger on, and the child can become a tool in this conflict (Fischer, De Graaf and Kalmijn 2005). In sum, the effect of an early divorce consists of two effects: a decline in investments and the loss of a female kinkeeper. Both these effects should result in sharply reduced support from children during old age.¹

The situation of a late divorce is quite different. In this case, most of the investments in children have already been made so that there will be no clear

difference in the investments of fathers who divorced late and fathers who are still married. Hence, the argument about investments does not imply a disadvantage for divorced fathers in this case. The argument about marriage protection has a different implication. When fathers are divorced, even when this is at a later age, they still miss the protection of a kinkeeper, which will result in reduced support from the children. The comparison between early and late divorces can thus be used to examine the role of marriage protection more directly. If only the argument about investments is valid, we should primarily see a negative effect of an early divorce. If a late divorce also has a negative effect, this would point to the role of marriage protection.²

A similar argument can be made for the stage of widowhood. Becoming a widower does not reduce opportunities to invest in children but it does result in the loss of a female kinkeeper. In other words, widowhood and an early divorce will have different effects on fathers. In both cases, the protection of a marital bond disappears, but in the case of widowhood, there will be no additional negative effect due to reduced investment opportunities. Hence, if we also find a negative effect of widowhood on gender differences in intergenerational support, this would be more conclusive evidence for the marriage protection hypothesis.

Widowhood itself will also have an impact. For example, research has shown that support from children tends to increase when the spouse dies (Ha et al. 2006). Similarly, levels of contact with children increase after the spouse dies (Roan and Raley 1996). These increases largely reflect a greater need for support, not only because the spouse is no longer there, but also because of the grief that comes with widowhood. It is less likely, however, that such effects are gender-specific. There may be specific male tasks that mothers may need help for after their husbands die, and there are specific female tasks that fathers need help with after their wives die (Ha et al. 2006). This does not necessarily imply increased gender differences in the overall level of support.

Effects of divorce and widowhood need to be considered in combination with the role of new unions and new children. Because a new spouse is an alternative source of support, one would expect that parents receive less support from the children of their first union when they enter a new union.³ The question is whether fathers and mothers will be affected differently. One argument lies again in the notion of kinkeeping. The new partner of the father will be focused more strongly on her own kin, thereby possibly diverting the father's attention away from his own children. Another consideration is that wives are generally more supportive in a couple relationship than husbands (Umberson et al. 1996). Hence, the new partner of the mother will be a poorer alternative source of support than the new partner of the father. Remarried mothers may therefore rely more on their children than remarried fathers.

The role of new children should also be considered. Like a new spouse, new children can be an alternative source of support. One would therefore expect that when parents have children with another partner, the relationship with the children of the previous partner will be weakened. Several authors in the past have argued that this applies in particular to fathers: Fathers would engage in serial parenting where they replace ties to one set of children with ties to another

set of children (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991). A possible reason for this is that it is easier for fathers to invest in children when the children are part of the household (Manning and Smock 1999). Fathers may experience difficulties in maintaining ties to their earlier children after divorce and may therefore decide – possibly reluctantly – to shift their investments to the new children. If these assumptions are valid, we would expect that relationships between fathers and children are more negatively affected by the birth of new children than relationships between mothers and children.

Previous Evidence

Life course effects, and in particular the effects of parental divorce, have been studied in two ways. One set of studies focuses on young children and examines what happens with father-child ties in the first years after divorce (e.g., Cooksey and Craig 1998; Seltzer 1991). These studies generally focus on fathers and do not make comparisons with mothers. Another set of studies focuses on effects of parental life course transitions on ties with children who live independently. In most cases, these studies also focus on the long-term effects of parental life course transitions.⁴ Table 1 presents an overview of the second type of research by summarizing 17 recent studies that examine the impact of the parental life course on relationships with adult children. The overview is limited to studies focusing on contact and support. Studies examining effects on perceived relationship quality are not included (see, for example, Kaufman and Uhlenberg 1998).

The overview first makes clear that most studies examine the role of parental divorce. Moreover, most studies analyze contacts between parents and adult children and not support. Although comparisons are often made between divorced fathers and mothers, these are not always tested statistically and they are seldom based on comparisons *within* families. All studies find that a parental divorce reduces contacts between fathers and children. Fathers appear to be affected more negatively than mothers, but studies differ in the degree to which they find persistent negative effects on contacts with mothers.

Some authors also look at effects on the support that parents receive from children (3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12).⁵ Studies point to negative effects of a parental divorce, but the results are less consistent than they are for social contacts. That there is less systematic evidence on gender differences in support is partly due to the fact that the most often used survey, the *National Survey of Families and Households*, asked for the support that people give to parents in general, without making a distinction between fathers and mothers (4, 5).

Studies on divorce have focused almost exclusively on a divorce that occurs when the children are still young. The breakdown of a marriage may also have consequences for parent-child relationships if it occurs when the children are older. Four studies have examined late divorces and have found that social contacts with fathers decline after divorce, whereas the effects on contacts with mothers were less consistent (1, 2, 4, 15).⁶ Bulcroft and Bulcroft (1991) are the only ones who compare late and early divorces. They show that an early divorce has a more negative impact on intergenerational contact than a late divorce, in particular for fathers.

Table 1: Overview of Studies on the Effects of the Parental Life Course on Support Received From Adult Children (Since 1990)

Authors	Country	Type of indicator	Who reports	Age parents	Age child	Effects of divorce vs. Marriage	Effects of widowhood	Effects of new unions	Test gender
[1] Cooney & Uhlenberg 1990	USA	social contacts	parent	62		negative (fath)		vs. single divorced: n.s. (fath)	No
[2] Bulcroft & Bulcroft 1991	USA (NSFH)	visits	parent	68		negative (moth) negative (fath)	vs. married: negative (moth) negative (fath)		Yes
[3] Eggebeen 1992	USA (NSFH)	social support	parent	40-75+		n.s. (par)	vs. married: positive (par)		No
[4] Aquilino 1994a ^c	USA (NSFH)	social contacts	child	54	27	negative (fath) negative (moth)	vs. married: negative (fath) n.s. (moth)		No
[5] Aquilino 1994b	USA (NSFH)	social contacts	child	54	27	n.s. (moth) negative (fath)		vs. married: negative (moth) ^b	Yes
[6] Furstenberg et al. 1995	USA (PSID)	time to parent	child	59		negative (fath) n.s. (moth)		vs. married: negative (par)	Yes
[7] Lye et al. 1995	USA (NSFH)	social contacts	child	62	35	negative (par)	vs. married: n.s. (par)	vs. married: negative (par)	No
[8] Roan & Raley 1996	USA (NSFH)	social contacts	child		25+		vs. married: positive (moth)		n.a.p.
[9] Dykstra 1997	Netherlands (LASA)	support	parent	70		negative (fath) negative (moth)			Yes
[10] Dykstra & De Jong Gierveld 1997 ^r	Netherlands (LASA)	support	parent	70		negative (fath) n.s. (moth)	vs. married: positive (fath) positive (moth)		No

[11] Barrett & Lynch 1999 ^a	USA (NLTCS)	help	parent	77		positive (par)	vs. married: positive (par)	Yes
[12] Pezzin & Schone 1999 ^b	USA (AHEAD)	informal care	par	79			vs. divorced: positive (fath) n.s. (moth)	No
[13] Fokkema & De Graaf 2001	Netherlands (SIN)	social contacts	par	58	31	negative (fath) n.s. (moth)	vs. married: negative (fath) n.s. (moth)	No
[14] Grundy & Shelton 2001	Great Britain (BSAS)	social contacts	child		22-54			No
[15] Shapiro 2003 ^c	USA (NSFH)	social contacts	parent	62		negative (fath) positive (moth)		Yes
[16] Tomassini et al 2004	Italy (IMFSS)	social contacts	child	65+		n.s. (moth) negative (fath)	vs. married: n.s. (moth) n.s. (fath)	No
[17] Tomassini et al 2004	Finland (GOAL)	social contacts	child	62-76		n.s. (moth) n.s. (fath)	vs. married: positive (moth) n.s. (fath)	No
[18] Tomassini et al 2004	Great Britain (OS)	social contacts	child	65+		n.s. (moth) negative (fath)	vs. married: n.s. (moth) n.s. (fath)	No
[19] Ha et al. 2006	USA (ACL)	support	parent	70			vs. married: more positive for moth than fath	Yes

Note: fath = father, moth = mother, par = parent. Ages are means or ranges (when means are not available).

^a This study also measures support but the support question refers to parents in general.

^b Pertains to remarriage of mother during childhood. ^c Pertains to a divorce occurring when the child(ren) were adults.

^d Pertains to impaired elderly. ^e Pertains to parents who live alone.

As the overview in Table 1 shows, some studies have also examined the influence of widowhood on intergenerational relationships. In contrast to the findings for parental divorce, the results here do not generally show negative effects. In most studies, there are no significant differences between widowed and married parents in terms of social contacts (4, 7, 16, 18). Because there are many more widows than widowers, most of the research on widowhood is based on women. The few papers that also look at widowers separately indeed find that widowers have less frequent contact with their children than married fathers (4, 14). When the focus is on the support that children give to parents, rather than on social contacts, the results show that widowed parents receive *more* support from their children than married parents (3, 10, 11). The most common explanation for this is that children compensate for the missing support of the spouse. How this interacts with the gender of the surviving parent is not well-known, but a recent study suggests that widows indeed rely more on their children than widowers (19).

Another important transition that has been studied is the formation of new unions by the parents. Some authors compare remarried parents with married parents and find negative effects on social contacts and support (6, 13). Gender differences have not systematically been examined but the studies do suggest that fathers are more negatively affected than mothers. Other authors compare remarried parents with divorced parents and in this comparison, remarried parents do not have less contact with their children (1). Most of these studies are based on social contacts so little is known about how remarriage affects the support that is given to fathers and mothers. Moreover, several studies apply to effects of parental remarriage during childhood on later intergenerational relations, rather than to effects of current remarriages of the parents (5, 7). Because second marriages often dissolve (Booth and Edwards 1992), it is important to view parental remarriage from a dynamic perspective.

In a few recent studies, it has been argued that the effects of new unions should be regarded in combination with the role of new children. These studies show that among fathers, new children have negative consequences for contacts with children from the first marriage. Interesting, however, is that this applies only to fathers who have new biological children. When a father marries a new partner who already has children living at home from a previous marriage, there is no negative effect on the father's ties to his earlier children (Cooksey and Craig 1998; Manning and Smock 1999). Note that the few studies analyzing effects of new children are based on fathers and non-resident younger children, not on relations with adult children.⁷

Data, Design and Measures

The data used for the present study come from a new large-scale study of family relations: the *Netherlands Kinship Panel Study*. The NKPS is a nationally representative survey among more than 8,000 respondents (anchors) who were 18 to 79 years of age (Dykstra et al. 2004b). Interviews were held with respondents at home using CAPI-interview schedules and additional self-administered questionnaires. About 43 percent of the potential respondents refused to be interviewed and 11 percent

was not reached. Response rates like these are about average for the Netherlands; for details, see Dykstra et al. (2004a). The first wave was collected in 2003, and data for the second wave will be collected in 2006 and 2007.

The focus of the analysis is on adult and independently living respondents with a living parent (of any age). Reports by children on the support they give to their parents are utilized and the support given to fathers and to mothers is compared. The unit of analysis is the parent-child dyad. There are 8,040 parent-child dyads (3,409 fathers and 4,681 mothers) in the data, and these are connected to 5,067 anchor respondents. The children were born between 1946 and 1979 and the parents were born between 1911 and 1950 (ignoring the oldest and youngest 5 percent). The average age of the children is 39 years; the average age of the parents is 68 years.

The Dutch context is a normal example of the modernized western world. In past decades, marriage and fertility rates have declined and divorce rates have increased. The current total fertility rate is 1.7, and the average age of the mother at first birth is 29, which is comparatively late. Currently, it is estimated that about one in every three newly formed marriages will be dissolved through divorce.⁸ Gender roles have become more egalitarian over time, just like in other western countries, but the change has been especially rapid in the Dutch context, and the Netherlands now belongs to the more egalitarian countries (Kalmijn 2003).

Measures of the Parental Life Course

Table 2 provides an overview of the variables, along with their frequency distributions. The central independent variables are based on the life course history of the parent(s) of the anchor respondent. First, we include two dummy-variables indicating (a) whether the parents ever divorced and (b) whether one of the parents was widowed. For both effects, the reference group consists of parents who are still together. Cohabitation and marriage are treated as equivalent throughout the paper and the word "marriage" is used to denote both. Cohabitation is rare among the parents in the sample. To simplify the models, divorced parents whose former partners have died are treated as divorced in the regression models and not as widowed.

The second set of variables replaces the variable for divorce with two dummy-variables, one for an early divorce and one for a late divorce. Late is defined as a divorce occurring when the respondent was 18 years or older.⁹ There were few cases of early widowhood (at least for an early loss of the respondent's mother), so this distinction was made only for divorced parents.

The third set of variables pertains to what happened after the parents' marriage dissolved. I construct two variables: (a) currently remarried and (b) previously remarried while currently single. Living together with a new partner is also counted as remarried. Remarriage is coded in a cumulative fashion, which means that the variables for divorce and widowhood stay in the model when remarriage is added and these variables are not reset to 0 after a remarriage.

To assess whether the father or mother had new biological children, I examined whether the anchor respondent had any half-siblings who were born after the year of the marital dissolution of the parents. The variable is coded 1 if a half-

Table 2: Descriptive Information on the Marital Status History of Parents: Percentages and Raw Numbers in Parentheses (N = 8045)

	Fathers		Mothers	
	%	N	%	N
Type of dissolution				
Parent in first marriage	74.9	(2541)	54.6	(2540)
Parents divorced	15.3	(520)	13.5	(630)
Parent widowed	9.8	(332)	31.9	(1482)
Total	100.0	(3393)	100.0	(4652)
Timing of dissolution				
Early divorce (anchor < age 18)	71.0	(369)	69.8	(440)
Late divorce (anchor ≥ 18)	29.0	(151)	30.2	(190)
Total	100.0	(520)	100.0	(630)
Marital transitions after dissolution				
Parent currently single, never remarried	45.8	(390)	81.1	(1712)
Parent currently single, previously remarried	8.2	(70)	5.6	(119)
Parent currently remarried	46.0	(392)	13.3	(281)
Total	100.0	(852)	100.0	(2112)
New children after dissolution				
No new children after first marriage	93.5	(797)	97.9	(2068)
New children after first marriage	6.5	(55)	2.1	(44)
Total	100.0	(852)	100.0	(2112)

Note: Marriage includes cohabitation. There are fewer divorced fathers than mothers because more divorced fathers than mothers have died.

sibling was born to the father or mother after the dissolution year (otherwise 0). Note that half-siblings may not always be perceived as siblings, for example, when the respondent never shared a household with the new child. In the interview we explicitly added a definition for half-sibling in hopes of preventing such perceptions from biasing the results.

Measures of Support

We use the following measures of intergenerational support: (a) giving advice to parents, (b) doing household work (e.g., cooking, cleaning, groceries, laundry), (c) giving practical help (e.g., running errands, transportation, lending things, repairs), (d) giving emotional support (i.e., inquiring about one's personal life), (e) attending the birthday of the parent, (f) face-to-face contact, (g) phone contact. Preliminary analyses show that for all items, a significant gender difference exists: Fathers receive less from their children than mothers (Table 3).

To simplify the regression models, this research focuses on two scales: contact and support. The contact scale is the sum of the number of face-to-face contacts and the number of phone contacts. The detailed answering categories

Table 3: Contact and Support From Children to Parents as Reported by Children

	To mother	To father	Test
Approximate annual number of face-to-face contacts	67	57	8.7*
Approximate annual number of phone contacts	78	50	20.2*
Child giving household help to parent (%)	47	32	18.2*
Child giving practical help to parent (%)	56	46	13.3*
Child giving advice to parent (%)	72	62	12.5*
Child giving emotional support to parent (%)	73	63	14.1*
Child attends parent's birthday (%)	89	84	7.0*
N of relationships	4676	3395	

Note: Tests obtained from OLS regression (t-value; for contact frequency) and logistic regression (z-value for other items). Regression analyses corrected for clustering.

* $p < .05$.

were recoded into a numeric scale indicating the approximate number of contacts in the past 12 months. The natural logarithm of the summed frequency was taken in order to avoid heteroskedasticity.

The support scale is a combination of the five support items. The scale is a count of whether the forms of support were given in the past three months. For emotional support, only frequent support in the past three months was counted because incidental emotional support is very common. The contact and the support scales are highly correlated ($r = .57$).

Models

To estimate the effect of the parental life course, father-child dyads and mother-child dyads are pooled into a single dataset. Subsequently, the contact and support scales are regressed on the life course of the parents and a set of control variables. Because the cases are dependent (fathers and mothers are linked to the same anchor respondents), the standard errors were adjusted for clustering.

A series of regression models was estimated to assess the effects of life course transitions on support, as well as to assess how these effects differ for fathers and mothers. Model A1 estimates the effects of divorce and widowhood for fathers and mothers simultaneously while including the main effect of the gender of the parent. Gender is coded 1 for fathers and 0 for mothers. Model A2 adds interaction effects of the gender of the parent and the life course variables. A negative interaction of divorce and gender would indicate that the disadvantage of fathers is aggravated for divorced parents. A negative interaction effect of gender and widowhood would indicate that the disadvantage of fathers is aggravated for widowed parents.

Subsequent models add variables pertaining to the timing of the dissolution (Model B), the presence or occurrence of new unions (Model C), and new children (Model D). Each of these models has a version without gender interactions (B1, C1, D1) and a version with gender interactions (B2, C2, D2).

Control Variables

In all models, the following control variables are included: the age of the parent, the education of the parent, the education of the child, and the life course of the child (measured with three variables: having children under 6 at home, living with a partner, and ever have been divorced). The age of the parent is interacted with the gender of the parent because age effects may differ between fathers and mothers. Also included is the degree to which the respondent was socialized into an extended family orientation when he or she was 15 years of age. The latter variable is a count of the following items: if the anchor stayed at the house of the parent's family members, if the parent's family members stayed at the house of the anchor, if the parent's parents lived in the same city or town, and if the anchor ever went on vacation with extended family members. These control variables are known in the literature to affect intergenerational contact and exchange and

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Children's Contacts With Parents: Unstandardized Coefficients (P-values in Parentheses)

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2
Father vs. mother	-.445* (.00)	-.242* (.00)	-.443* (.00)	-.242* (.00)	-.404* (.00)	-.240* (.00)	-.400* (.00)	-.238* (.00)	-.400* (.00)	-.238* (.00)
Divorced vs. married	-.784* (.00)	-.311* (.00)			-.570* (.00)	-.251* (.00)	-.451* (.00)	-.137 (.11)	-.450* (.00)	-.147 (.08)
x father		-1.021* (.00)				-.745* (.00)		-.711* (.00)		-.693* (.00)
Divorced early			-.856* (.00)	-.334* (.00)						
x father				-1.124* (.00)						
Divorced late			-.618* (.00)	-.262* (.02)						
x father				-.774* (.00)						
Widowed vs. married	.025 (.58)	.155* (.00)	.028 (.53)	.155* (.00)	.108* (.02)	.177* (.00)	.120 (.01)	.186* (.00)	.120* (.01)	.188* (.00)
x father		-.255* (.00)		-.252* (.01)		-.096 (.30)		-.070 (.45)		-.076 (.41)
Currently w/ new partner					-.514* (.00)	-.200 (.06)	-.606* (.00)	-.285* (.01)	-.605* (.00)	-.309* (.01)
x father					-.408* (.01)			-.444* (.01)		-.405* (.01)
Previously w/ new partner							-.534* (.00)	-.508* (.01)	-.531 (.00)	-.565* (.00)
x father								-.141 (.65)		-.048 (.88)

suggests that how gender differences vary across the parental life course is probably not affected by gender-specific changes in levels of need.

Geographic distance is sometimes included as a control variable in empirical models of contact and support. Although distance certainly has an empirical effect on contact and support (Kalmijn 2006), distance is an endogenous variable. For example, parental need for support may motivate children to move closer to their parents or it may prevent them from moving further away. In more general terms, the processes and variables that may explain support may in part operate through their effect on distance. For these reasons, it was decided not to include geographic distance and to simply analyze the total effects on support, not the net effects after controlling for distance.

Table 5: Regression Analysis of Children's Support To Parents: Unstandardized Coefficients (P-values in Parentheses)

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2
Father vs. mother	-.520* (.00)	-.305* (.00)	-.519* (.00)	-.304* (.00)	-.471* (.00)	-.300* (.00)	-.468* (.00)	-.299* (.00)	-.468* (.00)	-.299* (.00)
Divorced vs. married	-.464* (.00)	-.035 (.62)			-.206* (.00)	.069 (.38)	-.107 (.15)	.183* (.04)	-.107 (.15)	.172* (.05)
x father	-.922* (.00)					-.652* (.00)		-.679* (.00)		-.657* (.00)
Divorced early			-.543* (.00)	-.116 (.17)						
x father			-.912* (.00)							
Divorced late			-.284* (.00)	.147 (.20)						
x father			-.938* (.00)							
Widowed vs. married	.240* (.00)	.413* (.00)	.243* (.00)	.417* (.00)	.340* (.00)	.451* (.00)	.350* (.00)	.460* (.00)	.350* (.00)	.462* (.00)
x father	-.438* (.00)		-.440* (.00)			-.274* (.01)		-.263* (.01)		-.270* (.01)
Currently w/ new partner					-.621* (.00)	-.349* (.00)	-.697* (.00)	-.433* (.00)	-.697* (.00)	-.460 (.00)
x father						-.330* (.04)		-.316* (.05)		-.271 (.09)
Previously w/ new partner							-.445* (.00)	-.505* (.01)	-.443* (.00)	-.566* (.00)
x father								.123 (.67)		.230 (.44)

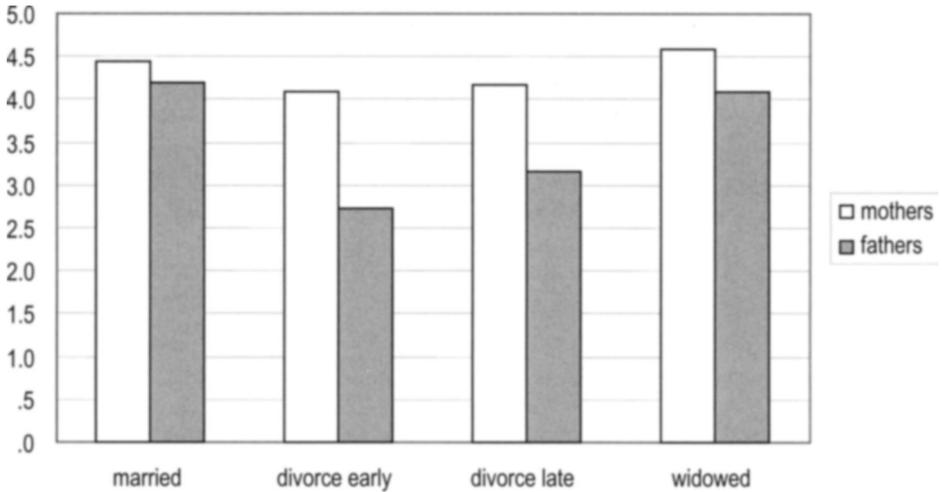
receive less support from and have less contact with their children than married mothers. The interaction shows that these gender differences are increased when parents are divorced.

The results for widowhood are similar. Overall, we see that widowed parents receive *more* support from their children than married parents (Model A1, Table 5). This is in line with earlier research and can be explained in terms of compensation for the support that the parent no longer receives from the spouse. Widowed parents do not, however, receive more visits or phone calls – the effect on the contact scale is not significant (Model A1, Table 4). Both dependent variables show a significant interaction effect with gender (Model A2). Although widows receive more support than married mothers ($b = .413$), this positive effect is weaker for fathers. The resulting effect for widowers is near zero ($b = .413 - .438 = -.025$). For social contacts, there is a positive and significant effect for mothers ($b = .155$) but this effect is again weaker for fathers, resulting in an overall negative effect ($b = .155 - .255 = -.100$). Hence, widowed mothers receive more support and contact from children than married mothers, but widowed fathers receive the same amount of support as married fathers and have even less contact with children than married fathers. Another way of saying this is that the gender gap which already exists in marriage increases during widowhood. Of course, there is no gender gap *within* the family during the stage of widowhood, but there is a gender gap at the aggregate level.

In general, gender differences for both social contacts and support increase when the marriage is dissolved. This is true when the parents divorce, but it is also true when one of the parents dies, thereby confirming the general notion that marriage protects men. It is still important to see if there is a divorce effect. To examine this, we need to compare the interaction of gender and divorce with the interaction of gender and widowhood. The difference between these two interaction effects is statistically significant for both contact ($t = 5.61, p < .01$) and support ($t = 3.61, p < .01$). Gender differences are increased more during divorce than during widowhood. In other words, fathers are not only protected by marriage, they are also negatively affected by divorce.

The divorces taken into account occurred at different stages in marriages. Usually, the focus in the literature is on parents who divorce when they have minor-age children. To examine the difference between this stage and later divorces in which the children are independent adults, the divorce variable is replaced by two variables in Model B1: a late divorce variable and an early divorce variable (using the age of 18 of the child as a cut-off point). The results show that the effects of a late divorce are less negative than the effects of an early divorce, in line with what one would expect. The differences between a late divorce and an early divorce are statistically significant ($t = 2.24, p = .03$ for contacts and $t = 2.40, p = .02$ for support). Important to observe, however, is that the effects of a late divorce by itself are negative and significant as well. This applies to both contact and support. Hence, even though a late divorce has a weaker impact on intergenerational relations, its impact is still negative.

A more important question is whether the timing of divorce is more consequential for fathers than for mothers. If the divorce effect is due to reduced

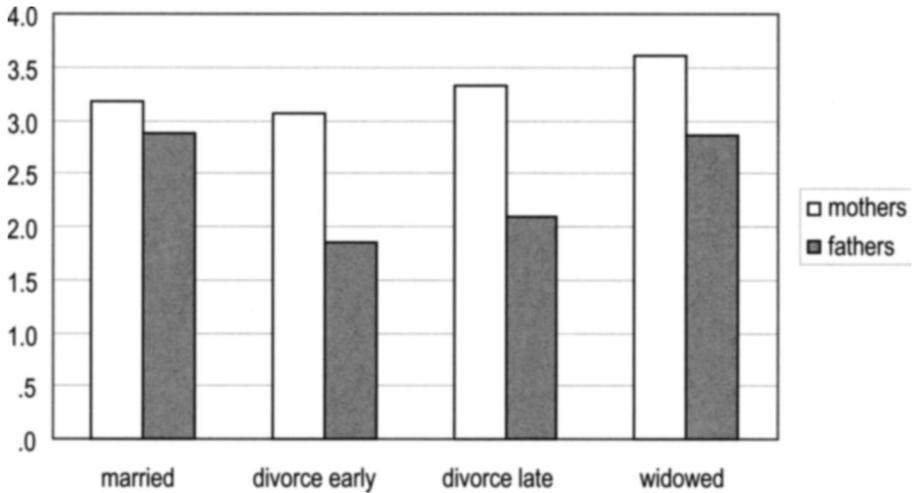
Figure 1. Levels of Contact with Child by Gender and Life Course Stage of Parent

Note: Predictions based on Model B2 (evaluated at means).

opportunities to invest in children when they are young, we would expect that a divorce only increases the gender gap if it occurs when the children are young. This is examined in Model B2, where the gender of the parent is interacted with a late and an early divorce. For social contacts, the interaction of gender and divorce is significant for both early and late divorces, even though the interaction effect is stronger for early divorces. For support, the gender interaction is more or less the same for early and late divorces. In other words, a divorce increases the disadvantaged position of fathers vis-à-vis mothers, regardless of the timing of the divorce. This is further evidence for the marriage protection hypothesis.

I present expected values for support in Figure 1 and for contact in Figure 2. These figures are based on Model B2, which contains the distinction of the life course in four categories (married, divorced early, divorced late and widowed). All predictions are for fathers and mothers separately, and the other independent values are evaluated at their means. We see that all life course stages have a gender gap. The gap increases when parents divorce but the gap is also present when parents divorce late. The gender gap during widowhood is smaller than it is after divorce but it is still larger than it is during marriage.

Model C1 adds information on whether the parent is living with a new partner at the time of the survey. Because the variables for divorce and widowhood remain in the model, the effect of a new partner describes the difference between a remarried parent and a parent who lives alone (after widowhood or divorce). The overall effect is negative for both social contacts and social support. Hence, parents who live together with a new spouse receive less support from their children than parents who live alone. Because remarried parents have a new spouse who can give support, this effect is consistent with expectations. Note,

Figure 2. Levels of Support to Parent by Gender and Life Course Stage of Parent

Note: Predictions based on Model B2 (evaluated at means).

however, that the effects are cumulative. Compared to married parents, parents who remarry after divorce experience a double negative effect (the effect of divorce and the effect of remarriage).

More relevant is that the effect of remarriage interacts significantly with gender. In Model C2, the main effect of remarriage on contact applies to mothers and this effect is only marginally significant, even though it is still in the expected direction ($b = -.200$). The interaction effect shows that remarriage has a significantly more negative effect on contact with fathers than on contact with mothers ($b = -.200 + -.408 = -.608$). The same pattern is observed for the support that parents receive (Model C2, Table 5). In other words, remarriage separates fathers more from their original children than it does mothers.

An important change occurs when the remarriage variables are added to the model (compare Model C2 to Model A2). The interaction effects of gender and divorce, as well as the interaction effects of gender and widowhood, are reduced substantially when the interaction of gender and remarriage is added to the model. This applies to both contact and support. The reductions are 27 and 29 percent for the divorce-gender interactions and 62 and 37 percent for the widowhood-gender interactions. These results suggest that part of the reason why a marital dissolution hurts fathers more lies in the fact that fathers remarry more often than mothers and that a remarriage separates fathers more from children. Important to emphasize, however, is that the interaction of gender and divorce remains significant for both contact and support. The interaction of gender and widowhood remains significant for support. Hence, even when we take into account that fathers remarry more often, we see that widowhood affects fathers' support from children more (negatively) than mothers' support from children.

Current information on remarriage may not be sufficient to assess the role of new unions after divorce or widowhood because people may have ended their new union before the survey. Second marriages are more unstable than first marriages (Booth and Edwards 1992). In Model D1, information on previous unions is added. The results show that past new unions also have a negative effect on social contacts and support. The effect is somewhat weaker than the effect of a current union. Tests indicate, however, that these differences are not or only marginally significant ($t = .48$, $p = .63$ for social contacts and $t = 1.76$, $p = .08$ for social support). In other words, the weakening of the relationship with children that occurs when a parent enters a new relationship is not reversed when that parent is alone again. The negative effect of remarriage appears irreversible. We note that the interaction effect of gender and remarriage is only present for current unions, and not for past unions.

Our final model includes the presence of new biological children. The statistical power is somewhat limited here, as there are only 99 parents who had new biological children. All cases of parents with new children occurred to divorced parents, not to widowed parents. In the models without gender interactions, we see no significant effect of new children on social contact and support (Model E1, Table 4 and 5). The model which includes interaction effects, however, suggests a differential effect of new children, depending on gender.

When looking at support, we see that for mothers, there is a positive effect of new children on the support that they receive from their older children ($b = .425$). The interaction with gender is negative and marginally significant ($p = .06$). The total effect for fathers amounts to a negative effect ($b = .425 - .684 = -.259$). Hence, fathers receive less support from their older children when they have new children. For contact, the results are somewhat weaker, but they point in a similar direction. Although we should be cautious in drawing firm conclusions given the levels of significance, the results for fathers are nonetheless consistent with two earlier American studies (Cooksey and Craig 1998; Manning and Smock 1999). Fathers weaken their ties to older biological children when they have new biological children. This is in line with the notion of serial (biological) parenting.

That the effect is positive for mothers needs to be replicated in other research before we can speculate on its causes. We note that the remarriage effects do not disappear when we take into account new children. New spouses and new children both probably form alternatives to the first set of children that fathers have.

In closing, we discuss the effects of the control variables. In line with other studies, we see that higher educated children have fewer contacts with their parents than lower educated children. This effect is largely due to the fact that the higher educated live farther away from their parents (Kalmijn 2006). At the same time, however, we see that higher educated children do not provide less support – they in fact provide more support. The education of the parent has no additional effect on contact, but it does increase the amount of support that parents receive. The number of siblings has the expected negative effect on both contact and support, showing that when parents have more children, they receive less from each child, even though they may receive more from the children combined. We further see that if the child was socialized into an extended family

orientation when he or she was 15 years of age, there is more contact with and support to parents at a later age.

The focus of this paper has been on the life course of the parents, but the life course of the children is also important for intergenerational ties (Rossi and Rossi 1990). Table 4 shows that when the grown child has young children at home, the amount of contact with the parents increases. This is probably due to the role of grandparenting. We also see a marginally significant negative effect of young children on the provision of support. This may point to the role of time constraints. We do not observe effects of being married, however. The child's own divorce has a significant effect as well. When the child experiences a divorce, he or she is less supportive toward the parents and has less contact with them. This has been observed in the literature before (Dykstra 1997). Given the well-known intergenerational transmission of divorce, this finding implies that a parental divorce has a double negative effect on intergenerational ties: through the divorce of the parent and through the (related) divorce of the child.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper has presented a new analysis of how gender differences in family relationships vary across the late parental life course. Using a recently collected survey among respondents in the Netherlands, and focusing on two central aspects of intergenerational relationships – contact and support – this research presents new evidence on gender differences. When married, fathers have less contact with their children than mothers and they also receive less support from their children. After a divorce, gender differences are increased to the fathers' disadvantage. This is generally more true for an early divorce than for a late divorce, and it is more true for divorce than for widowhood. Nonetheless, even after a late divorce and even after widowhood, differences between fathers and mothers are enlarged, thereby providing more direct evidence for the notion that marriage protects men. That the effects are larger for an early divorce than for a later divorce, and smaller for widowhood than for divorce, is consistent with the notion that reduced investments in children when they are young lead to less support from children later in the life course.

All in all, the findings are consistent with the hypothesis that men benefit from marriage when the focus is on informal support from children. During marriage, the support that children give to mothers may also benefit the father. For fathers, the breakdown of a marriage not only removes a spouse, it also removes a kinkeeper. This conclusion is generally in line with a different literature which points to the benefits of marriage for men's socioeconomic prospects and health outcomes (Kalmijn and Luijckx 2005; Korenman and Neumark 1991; Simon 2002; Williams and Umberson 2004). Even though my evidence for the marriage protection hypothesis is more direct than in previous studies, it is still indirect. Future research will need to establish a direct linkage between the kinkeeping role of wives and the support that fathers receive (or fail to receive) from children.

I also found evidence that a new marriage has a negative effect on contact with children as well as support from children. This effect is measured in reference

to divorced parents so that it represents a true new union effect, and not simply a divorce effect. The negative effect of remarriage is found for both fathers and mothers, but it is stronger for fathers. Put differently, gender differences are not only enlarged when parents split, they are further enlarged when parents remarry. Moreover, there is (somewhat suggestive) evidence that the gender gap is also enlarged when parents have new biological children.

In conclusion, there are three issues that need to be discussed. First, it was not possible with the data at hand to control for the degree to which fathers and mothers need support. The question here is not so much whether men and women differ in general in the need of support, but rather whether there is an interaction effect of gender and marriage on need. An analysis of health differences in the data suggests this is not the case. As a result, the overall gender difference may be partly explained by gender differences in need, but the degree to which gender differences vary across the life course is probably not affected by omitting need variables. Perhaps this study leads to an underestimation of gender differences. One could argue that among fathers and mothers who live alone, demand is greater among fathers than among mothers because many fathers don't possess household skills. In contrast to this notion, some studies show that fathers report less need than mothers (Spitze and Logan 1989). The problem with such findings, however, is that fathers may underreport their needs. In fact, part of the marriage protection effect may be that wives help husbands to monitor their (social) needs better.

A second caveat is about overall gender inequality. If the end of marriage has the effect of increasing differences between men and women, this does not necessarily mean that there is inequality between older men and women outside of marriage. Men may also obtain support from new spouses and new families and through formal channels. It can be debated, however, whether these are good alternatives. Because second marriages are more unstable than first marriages (Booth and Edwards 1992), these new ties will often be more fragile. Moreover, there is evidence that new unions that ended before the survey also weaken men's relationships with their children. Hence, the negative effect of remarriage on intergenerational ties is not easily reversed. This suggests that for men, new families are a partial and uncertain compensation for their old families.

Finally, we should recognize that there is another side to the debate about gender and aging. Many gerontological studies have pointed to the inequalities that have arisen in response to the demographic changes of the 20th century, such as the aging of the population, the widening mortality gap between men and women, and the increase in divorce (Hagestad 1986). Most of these studies have emphasized the disadvantaged position of women. Because women live longer and remarry less often, many older women are alone and rely on support from others. At the aggregate level, the position of elderly women is more fragile than the position of elderly men. The current paper does not argue with this, but it does point to the relatively fragile position of elderly men outside of marriage.

Notes

1. Another argument about divorce is that children will often experience a conflict of loyalties after the divorce of their parents. This will reduce the support that parents obtain, but it will not necessarily lead to greater differences between fathers and mothers.
2. A late divorce can also mean that the child is more independent in deciding about the way he or she distributes time between father and mother. This may also reduce the negative effect that a divorce has on fathers, if we assume that mothers sometimes obstruct contact with fathers after divorce.
3. Children may also reduce support or contact with the parent after remarriage out of loyalty with the other parent (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991).
4. Because a divorce can also occur when the children are older, effects on adult children should not be equated with long-term effects.
5. The numbers refer to the entries in Table 1.
6. Three of these studies use the same dataset (the NSFH).
7. This is also the reason why these studies are not in Table 1.
8. These figures can be found in the public database of Statistics Netherlands, <http://www.statline.nl>.
9. The age of legal majority in the Netherlands is 18.

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