The Divorced Parent and the Jewish Community

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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

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FOREWORD

Over the last decade there has been a swift, unprecedented rise in the American divorce rate. Whereas divorce used to be a rare occurrence, it is now estimated that half of all couples who marry today will eventually divorce. Although divorce in the Jewish community has not yet reached that level, it certainly is on the rise, and seems likely to approach the overall American rate in the near future.

The proliferation of divorce has serious implications for families. By disrupting the family unit, divorce diminishes the family's effectiveness in providing personal fulfillment and in transmitting ethical values and cultural traditions. Divorce also transforms two-parent families into single-parent families, with concomitant drops in income, standard of living, and parental interaction with the children. There is a snowball effect as well. Public awareness of the accelerating divorce rate has gradually made divorce socially acceptable, almost as "normal" as marriage itself. This undoubtedly influences young people, who, encountering the usual problems in adjusting to marriage, resort to quick divorces rather than work at resolving their difficulties.

The William Petschek National Jewish Family Center has been concerned for some time with the effects of divorce on American life in general and on the Jewish family in particular. This is our third report dealing with divorce. We have already published a report by Dr. Thomas J. Cottle on how divorce affects the Jewish identities of children, as well as a study by Dr. Nathalie Friedman and Dr. Theresa Rogers on how service providers in the Jewish community deal with the special needs of divorced families. This third publication is a follow-up study by the same two investigators. Utilizing in-depth personal interviews with 40 divorced Jewish couples of Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and unaffiliated backgrounds, Friedman and Rogers shed much light on the causes of Jewish divorce and on the postdivorce consequences for the families involved.

While this study makes no pretense of generalizing about all divorced Jews, two key findings have definite implications for communal policy.

First, the non-Orthodox divorces in our sample reveal the lack of clear and concrete reasons for marital breakup. Rather, these divorces occur because of vague, intangible tensions. Surely, there is a need for synagogues and other Jewish communal agencies to prevent such divorces by changing the climate of opinion about the routine nature of divorce and by developing premarital and postmarital counseling and other programs that enhance communication between spouses.

Second, on a more positive note, the researchers found that divorced families tend to keep their synagogue affiliations and continue their children's Jewish education despite time constraints and financial stringencies. It would appear that the need for communal affiliation actually increases in the wake of divorce. Unfortunately, many of the divorced Jews complain that rabbis and other Jewish professionals do not reach out to them sufficiently. Clearly, our communal institutions must mobilize their resources to serve divorced families and involve them in Jewish life. For example, a recognition of the financial problems that divorce brings should lead to the restructuring of membership fees for synagogues, schools, and Jewish centers.

There are no victimless divorces, and the chief victim is the child. The Jewish community must plan strategies to prevent divorce wherever possible, and to provide help once the divorce occurs. We hope that publication of this study will help advance both of these goals.

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INTRODUCTION

According to conservative estimates, almost one of every two marriages that took place in the United States in the last 15 years will end in divorce; by 1990 half of all children under 18 will have lived for some time with a single (divorced) parent.

Some sociologists view these projections with relative equanimity as reflections of and necessary adaptations to social change. Others hear the death knell of the family as we have known it and predict increased alienation of youth, more women and children living in poverty, the loss of the grandparent-grandchild relationship.

Most observers of the Jewish scene agree that the divorce rate among Jews is somewhat below that of the general population.* Projections of current rates suggest that at least one in every three or four Jewish couples married over the last 15 years will divorce, leaving an increasing number of Jewish children to grow up in the care of a single parent. The high divorce rate among Jews has triggered a good deal of unease within the Jewish community. The reasons for concern are many. A high Jewish divorce rate threatens the basic family structure, traditionally so essential to Jewish identity. It is likely to mean fewer children being born to Jewish families. And it is seen as raising a number of social, psychological, and economic problems that erode Jewish commitment, participation and involvement.

Little, however, is actually known about the impact of divorce on ties to the Jewish community. Do the social, economic, and psychological problems that often accompany divorce erode Jewish commitment and involvement? Are synagogue affiliation and attendance affected? Does the child's Jewish education continue? Do families turn to the Jewish community, and does that community serve in any way as a support system before, during or after divorce? What about those

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*Chaim I. Waxman, America's Jews in Transition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

with only minimal or no Jewish communal involvement prior to divorce -- to whom do they turn, and how do they cope in the aftermath of divorce?

These questions have been addressed by three studies commissioned by the American Jewish Committee's William Petschek National Jewish Family Center. In Divorce and the Jewish Child (1981), Thomas J. Cottle interviewed teenage children to learn how their parents' divorces affected their attitudes toward Judaism and their sense of Jewish identity.

In The Jewish Community and Children of Divorce (1983), the present authors interviewed rabbis, Hebrew and day school administrators, teachers, psychologists, social workers and YMHA program directors to see how Jewish institutions related to families contemplating, undergoing or coping with divorce.

The present study examines the same questions from the perspective of the divorced parents. Through interviews with 40 women and 25 of their former husbands, it explores the nature of the couples' communal ties both before and after their divorces, and inquires particularly into the impact of divorce on their religious affiliations. The study also focuses on the degree of support that Jewish communal institutions provided these couples, and suggests how the institutions can become more responsive to the needs of Jewish single-parent families.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

To examine how divorce affected family ties to the Jewish community, the authors sought answers to five questions:

1. What was the nature of the family's ties to the Jewish community prior to the divorce?

2. Did differences over Jewish observance and practice play a role in the divorce?

3. At the time of the divorce and after, what kinds of support, if any, did the Jewish community provide?

4. Since the divorce, have there been any changes in either the mother's, father's, or children's Jewish involvement and participation?

5. In what ways can the Jewish community help divorced parents and their children?

The sample selected for study spanned the religious spectrum from ultra-Orthodox to unaffiliated. The research design called for extensive interviews with 40 sets of parents: 10 Orthodox (including two ultra-Orthodox), 10 Conservative, 10 Reform, and 10 unaffiliated -- all divorced or separated from one to five years and with at least one child aged three to 16 at the time the marriage was dissolved.

The research design presented several problems when it came to classifying the family's religious orientation. How, for example, would one classify a family where the mother said she was unaffiliated and her ex-spouse called himself Conservative? What about the family in which the mother was affiliated with a Reform temple but identified herself as Conservative? Should a family be classified by its affiliation during the marriage or after the divorce? Since one purpose of the research was to look at Jewish identity and affiliation <u>after</u> a divorce, it was decided to classify families on the basis of

the temple or synagogue with which the custodial parent was affiliated, unless that parent clearly designated herself or himself otherwise. And, because the religious affiliation of a husband might differ from that of his wife, data were also collected on the current religious status of each parent, on the family during the marriage, and on each parent at the time he or she was growing up. Thus the religious odysseys of the 40 families could be traced, and Jewish affiliation after the divorce could be compared with that in the immediate and more distant past.

Prospective respondents were located with the help of community workers and of respondents who identified persons they thought it would be informative to interview. Typically, the referral was to the mother, who was usually the custodial parent. At the conclusion of the interview with one parent, permission was sought to contact the other parent so the study could report the perspectives of both.

The final sample consisted of 40 mothers and 25 fathers ranging in age between 31 and 62. All had lived in the New York City metropolitan area during their marriages. Fifteen of the fathers could not be interviewed -- four were not living in the United States or their whereabouts were unknown; four were not contacted at the wife's request; and seven refused. Interviews with the mothers were conducted between the fall of 1983 and the summer of 1984, and averaged about two hours in length. Most had difficulty scheduling the time: all but one were working or actively seeking work; several did not want to be interviewed when their children were present; others were reluctant to give up an evening because that was the children's time. Most of the interviews were conducted in the mother's home, but four took place in coffee shops during lunch hours or in offices immediately after work. Six interviews were conducted by telephone. Sometimes two or three sessions were needed to complete the interview.

In all but four instances the women were interviewed first. They described their former husbands' Jewish backgrounds and affiliations, if any, both before and during the marriage, and most were able to provide some information about their former husbands' participation in the Jewish community after the marriage ended. Thus, although 15 fathers were not interviewed, considerable background information about them was obtained. When the information provided by the mothers was compared with the self-reports of the 25 fathers who were interviewed, the accounts proved virtually identical.

Interviews with fathers were somewhat less lengthy, both because the mother had already provided the basic family information and because fathers were less likely to offer details about activities and feelings. Thirteen of the interviews with fathers were conducted in person -- again, either at home or elsewhere. The other 12 were conducted by telephone, primarily because the father was living outside the New York metropolitan area.

Because respondents differed widely in the extent of their Jewish involvement during and after the marriage, no two interviews proceeded in exactly the same way, but the same information was collected from all respondents.* As might be expected, items that led to lengthy answers from some respondents were of little or no relevance to others.

One note of caution. This research was not designed to permit generalization to the entire population of Jewish divorced persons. Its purpose, rather, was to uncover patterns, relationships, causal links and critical variables that might provide clues to how communal institutions can better serve that rapidly increasing phenomenon, the Jewish single-parent family.

*See Appendix for the interview guide.

PROFILE OF THE SINGLE PARENT

Social Characteristics

Most divorces in the United States take place within the first five years of marriage; but because this study concerned families with school-age children the couples selected for study had been married an average of 11 years at the time of the separation and had been separated or divorced for an average of four years. The original research plan was to restrict the sample to couples who had been divorced between one and five years, and in fact all but three couples fell into this category. However, the couples who had been divorced somewhat longer were included because their experiences point to some of the long-range effects of divorce on family members.

The steadily decreasing birth rate among Jews is a source of concern in the Jewish community, and the sample suggests that these fears are well founded. In only two families, both ultra-Orthodox, were there four or more children. Six families had three children; 17 had two (among them four sets of twins); and the remaining 15 families had only one child. The average number of children in the sample as a whole was 1.9, a figure well below the zero-population-growth point of 2.1. Had divorce (and perhaps years of unhappiness prior to divorce) not occurred, there might have been more children. Thus a high divorce rate probably compounds the problem of an already low Jewish birth rate.

A number of demographic characteristics are correlated with divorce rates in America. For example, divorce rates are higher among the less educated, the less affluent, those who marry young, and those who intermarry. Except for five intermarried couples, the respondents in the present study did not fit this profile of the divorce-prone. While all socioeconomic and educational levels were represented in the sample, the typical respondent was a well-educated, middle- or upper-middle-class Jew living in New York City or a nearby suburb. Sixteen of the men were professionals -- lawyers, physicians, social workers, accountants; fourteen were in business or advertising; three

were in film, photography or entertainment; and five worked in blue-collar occupations. The remaining two were unemployed; one of these was occupied in "learning" -- that is, studying Torah.

The educational backgrounds of the men paralleled their occupational status. Two had almost no secular education but had "learned" in a yeshiva or kollel. Five others had only high-school educations, and 10 had no more than two years of college. Six were college graduates, and the remainder held the professional degrees requisite for their particular occupations.

Most of the women were well educated. Only 11 had less schooling than their husbands; another 11 had about the same amount of schooling; more then half (22) had more formal education than their husbands. Even among the professionals, there were wives who had more education than their husbands.

Perhaps because three out of four of the women were at least college graduates, their average age at marriage, 24, was considerably higher than the median age of women at first marriage in the general population (20.6).* In fact, only six women were between 18 and 21 when they married.

The men, too, were considerably older at the time they married than their counterparts in the general population. Their average age at marriage was between 27 and 28, compared to the national median of 22.5 for males.

Given their relatively high level of education, it is not surprising that most of the women in the sample had considerable work experience. Most had worked before marriage, and about a third had worked full- or part-time during the marriage. Fourteen women were attorneys, physicians, teachers, or social workers. Thirteen worked in the business world, either as proprietors of their own enterprises or as managers in banks or brokerage firms. The remainder had worked -- or were working -- in such traditional female occupations as secretaries, personnel assistants, and teaching aides. Ten women, however, had not worked before their divorces, when they became "displaced homemakers."

Recent data released by the National Center for Health Statistics indicate that almost three out of four divorced women, and more than four out of five divorced men, will remarry within several years of the divorce, and about half of these will divorce again. Sociologists, in fact, have begun to speak of "serial monogamy," the pattern

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*Since the average couple in the sample was married in 1972, the median ages at marriage for men and women in the general population were taken for that year.

in which individuals maintain a commitment to the institution of marriage but not to a particular spouse. For six respondents, the marriage and divorce that provided the focus for this research were neither their first nor their last. Two of the women and four of the men had been previously married and divorced. Neither of the women, but three of the men, had a child from the earlier marriage. In all three cases, the child was in the custody of the mother.

Six women and 13 men had remarried since the divorce about which they were interviewed, and 10 of the 19 had been divorced or separated again. Two men were in their third marriages at the time of the interview.

From a Jewish perspective, divorce and remarriage do not necessarily put an end to the traditional nuclear family but may, in fact, eventuate in two "reconstituted" nuclear families, either or both of which may produce more children and serve as transmitters of Jewish identity. On the other hand, religious affiliation and observance may be disrupted when family ties change. For some of the children in the sample the influence of stepparents as well as natural parents sometimes resulted in conflicting norms about Jewish participation and observance.

Religious Backgrounds and Affiliations

Until recently, Jewish families tended to stress Jewish education more for boys than for girls. That this was the pattern at the time the men and women in the sample were growing up is strikingly evident. Thirty-one of the 37 men raised in Jewish homes had been exposed to some form of Jewish education -- ranging from a few months of Bar Mitzvah preparation to several years of intensive "learning" in a kollel. All 31 had had Bar Mitzvahs. In contrast, only 18 of the 37 women raised in Jewish homes reported that they had attended Sunday school, Hebrew school or Jewish day school. Six women reported that their brothers had gone to Hebrew school but that no such arrangements had been made for them. Ten women had had Bat Mitzvahs or been confirmed; six others, who had received a Jewish education, said that the Bat Mitzvah was not an institutionalized "rite of passage" in their communities when they were growing up.

The traditional categories of Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and unaffiliated are too broad to capture the many distinctions respondents made as they talked about what it was like to be Jewish as a child. Thirteen said they came from Orthodox backgrounds, but this meant variously that they grew up in the ultrareligious community of Williamsburg, that their upbringing was "modern Orthodox," that they belonged to an Orthodox synagogue but had little home observance, or that they were observant at home but seldom attended synagogue.

Another 23 respondents said that their parental backgrounds were essentially Conservative. Again, this had varied meanings. Some described their daily lives as "Conservadox," by which they meant affiliation with a Conservative synagogue but strict observance at home; others, though affiliated with Conservative synagogues, lived in homes where observance was minimal.

Seven respondents came from families affiliated with Reform temples. In these homes, observance ranged from moderate ("My mother occasionally lit candles on Friday night, and the family would get together for holiday dinners, but we weren't kosher at all") to minimal ("We really didn't observe anything; it's just that on the High Holidays we went to the Reform temple").

Finally, 22 men and women described their parental homes as unaffiliated. The variations within this category can best be captured through the words of respondents:

> Our home was totally American-Jewish, except that my parents forgot the "Jewish."

Said one woman:

> I grew up in a left-wing Yiddish, a-religious home. My parents were old-line Communists. But still, my father gave to UJA.

A man put it this way:

> Religious background? Zero! The only way I ever knew it was Rosh Hashanah was when I saw that alternate-side-of-the-street parking regulations were lifted. On the other hand, I always knew that I was Jewish.

Another man summed up his background as "kitchen-stove Judaism":

> My parents felt that Jewish culture was okay, but they saw religion as the opiate of the people. When the holidays came around, my mother would make kugel and things like that, and the family would get together.

Even apart from the five intermarried couples, the religious backgrounds of husband and wife were often quite different. As Table 1 indicates, in only 17 of the 40 families did the partners share similar Jewish backgrounds. In 18 families, there were substantial differences in the types of Jewish homes in which the partners had grown up.

In general, couples from dissimilar backgrounds tended to adopt the religious coloration of the less observant partner. In all but

TABLE 1

Religious Backgrounds of Men and Women in the Sample (by Family)

Similar Jewish backgrounds	17
Both Orthodox	5
Both Conservative (or "Conservadox")	6
Both Reform	2
Both unaffiliated	4
Different religious backgrounds	23
Both Jewish, but different types of affiliation	18
One partner not Jewish	5
Total	40

two cases where one partner's background included some degree of affiliation and the other's none, the couples were unaffiliated. Similarly, four of the five intermarried couples were unaffiliated even though the non-Jewish partners had converted. In only one instance did a couple adopt a pattern of more traditional religious observance and affiliation than the pattern in which either partner had been reared.

Partners from similar backgrounds tended to maintain their premarriage affiliations. With one exception, couples in which both partners came from Orthodox or Conservative homes preserved those identities. In four instances where both partners came from unaffiliated homes, the marital families were also unaffiliated. Of two couples from Reform homes, however, one affiliated with a Conservative synagogue and one became unaffiliated.

TIES TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY DURING THE MARRIAGE

During the years they were married, the patterns of affiliation and observance of these 40 couples varied widely. About half were completely unaffiliated with a synagogue or temple, had minimal or no home observance, and gave their children no Jewish education. For example, only 20 of the 40 couples had actually been members of synagogues or temples in the various communities in which they had lived while married. Among the other 20 couples, four said that they had never joined, but had occasionally attended services at neighborhood synagogues or temples; six said they occasionally went to their parents' or in-laws' synagogues for the High Holy Days; 10 couples stated that they had neither belonged to nor attended any house of worship.

It is difficult to attach denominational labels to the 20 couples who were affiliated while married, for some had joined synagogues of different denominations as they moved from one community to another or as their children grew ready for Sunday or Hebrew school. As one mother explained:

> First we lived in Queens, and we belonged to a Conservative synagogue there. Then we moved farther out on the Island, and when our son was ready for Sunday school we joined the Reform temple because that was where most of the Jewish families on our block belonged.

Or another:

> In Pennsylvania, where we lived the first five years of our marriage, we belonged to a Conservative synagogue -- it was the only one in town. Then when we moved to Manhattan, we joined a modern Orthodox synagogue in the neighborhood.

Just prior to separation, however, eight couples were affiliated with Orthodox and five with Conservative synagogues; seven belonged to Reform temples; and 20 were unaffiliated.

Absence of synagogue affiliation or attendance generally, but not necessarily, precluded some form of Jewish education for the children. In eight instances, the divorce had occurred before the child was old enough for Sunday or Hebrew school, and in eight others, although the children were of age, they had not received any Jewish education. In 16 families children had attended a Sunday or Hebrew school, and in eight families an Orthodox day school or yeshiva (Table 2).

TABLE 2

Jewish Education of Child(ren) During the Marriage (by Family)

Child(ren) of preschool age	8
No Jewish education	8
Sunday or Hebrew school	16
Day school or yeshiva	8

Observance in the home during the marriage ranged from "zero," as one respondent put it, to strictly Orthodox. For 12 families, observance of the Sabbath and holidays was simply not a part of their lives. As one commented:

> Home observance? None. I guess you could say we were borderline Christians because we observed Christmas, but also a little Hanukkah.

Several noted that, although they did not observe at home, they would occasionally go to their parents or in-laws for a Seder or a holiday meal. Ten families characterized their home observance as "minimal." As one explained:

> We'd observe the Sabbath and holidays off and on -- no regularity. Mostly in an "eating" sense, I guess. You know -- a special meal.

This "culinary" theme appeared regularly as these 10 families described home observance:

> Matzoh on Passover, but I guess that's about it.

> The family would get together for dinner on Rosh Hashanah.

A couple of times I made the Seder meal.

If there was any one holiday observed by these families, it tended to be Hanukkah:

> We used to light the menorah and give the children gifts.
>
> We thought it was important to celebrate Hanukkah because the children saw so much Christmas around them.

Several of the families said that, although they never attended services and their home observance was at best "limited," they kept their children home from school on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur because "we wanted them to know they were Jewish."

In nine families home observance was fairly regular, including candles on Friday night and the celebration of such holidays as Passover, Hanukkah, Purim and Simchat Torah with family meals, a Seder and special foods. Respondents in this group, however, were quick to add that they did not keep kosher homes. Typical was this woman's response:

> We didn't have a kosher home, but we did celebrate all the holidays -- Hanukkah, Seders, Purim (I'd get hamantaschen). Friday night was always special -- not in a religious sense -- but we had chicken and challah, and we tried not to make other plans on Friday nights.

Finally, nine families characterized themselves as "observant," "strictly observant" or "Orthodox." Their homes ranged from "kosher" to "strictly kosher," and all the holidays as well as the Sabbath were observed with their positive and negative commandments.

The couples' other links to the Jewish community while married were quite limited, even among those with strong synagogue ties. Several used the local Y or Jewish community center for clubs, classes, or gymnastics; a few belonged to Zionist organizations; several were involved with such organizations as B'nai B'rith, Jewish War Veterans and UJA/Federation. However, the majority had no links at all with any Jewish organizations or fraternal groups. As one Orthodox woman explained:

> We were young, busy raising children, and we had very little money. We couldn't afford either the time or the money for anything outside the shul or our son's yeshiva.

Others attributed the absence of Jewish organizational affiliations to lack of interest or simply to the fact that "we're not joiners."

In sum, the ties of these 40 couples to the Jewish community during the marriage varied widely. At the one extreme were about half the families with no synagogue or other Jewish organizational affiliation and minimal or no home observance. About one in four families described strong Jewish institutional ties, regular synagogue attendance and strict home observance of the Sabbath, holidays, dietary laws and other religious ritual. In between were some 10 families who were affiliated with a temple or synagogue, attended services frequently and marked the Sabbath and/or religious holidays with some degree of regularity. Even among those with only the most tenuous institutional connections, however, Jewish education for the children was not necessarily precluded; four of these families sent their children to Sunday or Hebrew schools and one (as long as the grandparents paid for it) to a day school.

THE DIVORCE EXPERIENCE

Factors Leading to the Divorce

The couples' reasons for ending their marriages probably reflect the experiences of most divorced couples in America. Some attributed the breakup to such unacceptable behavior on the part of their partners as violence or wife abuse (three cases), alcoholism or gambling (two cases), homosexuality (one case), and infidelity (five cases). These reasons were particularly frequent among the Orthodox couples. An ultra-Orthodox woman from Borough Park said:

> He was violent, abusive -- both to me and the children. I kept it all to myself, never went to the police about it, but finally some of the women who realized what was going on got the rabbis to help me leave.

Although infidelity was cited as a factor in five instances, in only three was it regarded as the determining factor. One woman explained:

> Yes, there was another woman, and he took off. But there were other things, too. He couldn't handle the pressure of a wife and children.

The word most frequently used by respondents as they spoke about the factors leading to the divorce was "incompatibility." This word proved to mean different things to different respondents. Some, for example, explained that they had married quite young and had grown apart over the years. One woman said:

> We married very young -- at twenty. Just growing up, I realized that our values were very different. He grew up in the South in a poor non-Jewish family. I'm from a very middle-class Jewish family, and I'm more materialistic. He's lazy and works at a slow pace while I'm impatient and driving.

In other instances, "incompatibility" referred to temperamental or personality differences. One man, for example, complained about his ex-wife's inability to communicate:

> We weren't on the same wave length. Her tuner is way down while mine tends to be all the way up.

A woman said of her ex-husband:

> He's a very selfish person -- totally involved with himself, egocentric. I just needed more love and affection -- it was lonely living with him.

A third kind of incompatibility was the couple's disagreement over the woman's role as wife, mother, and employed person. Often, this disagreement arose in the course of the woman's pursuit of personal growth, self-development, and career. One woman said:

> Once I went back to work it became clear that our interests were different. He was opposed to my going back to work. His idea of my role was to bring up the children, entertain, be at home for him. But I felt that I had to develop as a person, find my own identity that was not just a part of him and the children.

A second said that while her husband was still a student he could understand her working, but:

> Then he graduated and got a job, and he woke up to the fact that I was busy working and not home at 4:30 when he got home. I was trying to develop my career as a teacher, but he wanted me to be a "nine-to-three" teacher. I said that if I wanted that kind of job, I would have gone to work at the post office.

Her ex-husband confirmed that his wife's work had been a bone of contention:

> She worked hard all those years supporting us while I was in graduate school. When I finished, however, and began living like a person, I kind of expected that she would go back to being the woman I had married. But she had changed -- her job was very important to her. Her career was going gang-busters, and she was loving it.

Two men suggested that the women's movement played a role in their growing incompatibility with their wives. One said:

> I don't know what part this played, but my wife got all wrapped up in the women's movement and with all of her divorced and divorcing friends. She stopped observing our

wedding anniversary and said that the wedding ring was a symbol of slavery.

Finally, several respondents suggested that the prevailing social climate, in which divorce carried no stigma, was a factor in the breakup of their marriages. As one said:

> We are probably products of our age -- an age of divorce. I think that a lot of divorces that have taken place would not have taken place thirty years ago. People's expectations are higher when it comes to happiness in marriage.

The decision to divorce was generally initiated by the woman and accepted, often reluctantly, by the man. In those few instances where the divorce was initiated by the man, the cause was quite specific: he had met another woman; his wife was an "adulteress"; he couldn't make it financially and felt overwhelmed by marital and parental responsibilities. Only one of the 25 men interviewed attributed the divorce to <u>his</u> need for self-fulfillment or personal space.

The Jewish Factor

Was there a Jewish factor in the divorce decision? The answer is "yes and no." On the one hand, with only a few exceptions, respondents said that religious or Jewish issues were not precipitating factors. On the other hand, as the marriage bonds weakened, dissension over these issues surfaced in 14 of the 40 couples.

In three of the five interfaith marriages, religious issues were cited by at least one of the partners. Said a woman who had converted to marry a Reform Jew:

> Converting to Judaism didn't make me a Jew -- it made the wedding possible. I found I retained my identity as a Christian, and he resented that. We didn't separate because of religion, but it <u>was</u> one of the many issues that developed.

A man who had converted to marry a woman from a Conservative background said:

> For a while, it was fine. We went to Israel on our honeymoon and stayed for months -- we even thought of living there. We named the children in a synagogue. But then after a while, maybe because of my own personal problems, I became less interested in the religion, and I began to separate myself from her family. I don't really consider myself Jewish, nor did I during the marriage.

A Jewish woman married to a man who had converted said bitterly:

> I'd like to talk to all those potential converts who are doing it just to make the wedding possible and tell them "It won't work!" You are what you are, and I am what I am, and eventually it's going to wreak havoc on the marriage.

In nine other instances, while both partners were Jewish, they came from different religious backgrounds and Jewish issues surfaced. For example:

> First of all, there was another woman, but that was just the straw that broke the camel's back. Basically, we were just not compatible -- we had different values about almost everything. And eventually, even our differences over Judaism got to me -- he ate nonkosher outside while I was strictly kosher; and he worked on Shabbos while I wanted him to go to shul with me and the boys.

A woman from a Conservative background said of her ex-husband, who had been raised in an unaffiliated home:

> If I want to be very objective, I would have to say my husband was an anti-Semite. I always felt more Jewish. He used to blanch in front of his WASPy friends when I used a Jewish word. He'd give lip service, like paying for the temple and the children's Jewish education, but then he'd say, "That's it -- I don't have to do anything else."

A man from a Conservative background had a similar problem:

> My wife came from a completely assimilated background, but she agreed to keep a kosher home. Then she reneged. Religion was not at all important to her, but it was to me. I felt that there should be at least a minimal observance and understanding, but she had no interest at all -- not even for the High Holidays.

In three cases where dissension over religious issues surfaced, both partners came from fairly similar backgrounds. In one instance, where both were from Conservative homes, the wife complained that her husband was too passive about Jewish observance and participation and that she was tired of having to take the lead. In the second case, where both were from Reform backgrounds, the wife said:

> Jewish ties were not salient to us, but disagreement over them became an issue. He allied himself with this mystical group run by some Georgian who would fly in. He became a vegetarian and contemptuous of those who were not. I have a sense of commitment to Judaism which has been growing with age -- though it's not linked to organized Judaism.

And finally, in one instance, although both partners had come from Orthodox homes and had attended religious day schools, the wife said:

> He was always less religious than I, and we bickered a lot about it. I wanted to cover my head, and he thought that was silly. I didn't want to eat in a nonkosher restaurant, and he thought it was okay as long as we ate dairy. He opened up the mail and rode up in the elevator on Shabbos, and I wouldn't.

These findings suggest that when husband and wife come from similar religious backgrounds religious issues rarely surface. However, when the marriage is mixed (and that term is used to denote marriages in which the Jewish backgrounds are different as well as interfaith marriages), religious issues often contribute to the incompatibility of the partners.

Problems Encountered Dissolving the Marriage

Ending a marriage involves more than the decision of one or both partners to go their separate ways. It also means seeing a lawyer and resolving problems over finances, child custody, visitation rights and, in some instances, the get or religious divorce decree. Table 3 shows the frequency with which the 40 couples in the sample encountered problems in these four areas.

For 13 couples, things went relatively smoothly, both at the time of the divorce and after. As one woman put it:

> It was all very civilized; you might call it an amicable divorce. We decided on joint custody, and it's worked out

TABLE 3

Families Encountering Problems in Divorce

No problems	13
Financial	25
Custodial	6
Visitation	8
Get	4

well. Perhaps we're particularly lucky because money has not been a problem.

And another:

> No, no problems. We are a couple who have worked things out very agreeably. We decided on joint custody.

All six families who agreed upon joint custody arrangements reported relatively amicable divorces, suggesting that only when hostility between the principals is minimal can a joint custody arrangement be agreed upon and successfully implemented.

Sixteen couples reported problems in only one area -- 15 with finances, one with visitation. The mother who complained that visitation was a problem said:

> The boys seldom see their father -- maybe once every three months. He began to live with this woman shortly after the separation, and then he married her. She was always there when they visited. She picked the movie whether they wanted to see it or not. If she wanted to go to the shopping mall and they didn't, everyone went to the mall.

Financial problems ranged from delayed child-support checks to the disappearance of the ex-spouse. Three mothers were receiving welfare, and several others, although employed, were dependent on their parents. Several fathers confirmed that one consequence of divorce was a reduction in their standard of living. Said one:

> After the divorce, money absolutely disappeared. I was living in a seedy hotel with a few boxes and two jammed suitcases. That is all I owned after thirteen years of marriage. Before, it was two people working and one household, and we were still barely in the black. You can imagine what it was like stretching that money across two households.

One woman noted that finances were a problem not because there wasn't enough money but because:

> It's a thorn in his side to write a check every month. Every month it's a question of "When is it coming?" The anxiety carries over to our nine-year-old son because he's aware of it.

Ten couples experienced multiple problems. In one case where finances were not an issue, custody and visitation rights were. The mother explained:

> I really only wanted a little child support, and he sends four times more than is legally required. But custody arrangements and visitation rights were a problem, largely because of his drinking. He kept moving back and forth between California and New York and in and out of treatment programs. We couldn't draw up a custody agreement, and he couldn't visit our daughter or have her with him in any predictable fashion.

A woman who noted that her ex-husband's lack of responsibility had left her virtually the sole support for herself and her son added that visitation rights was also an acrimonious issue:

> I simply had to limit the visits and arrange that they always be in a supervised setting because of his total lack of responsibility.

The multiproblem couple was usually one whose divorce had been marked by hostility and where anger and bad feelings were still very much in evidence. As a result, every issue that had to be resolved became an occasion for the release of hostility. One woman said angrily:

> I couldn't stand him -- it was just enough. But it took two and a half years to get him out, and he won custody of the two older children -- actually bribed them to say that they wanted to live with him -- I was awarded the youngest. Money? He's fighting over every cent. There was a settlement, but he still fights over every alimony payment.

In several instances, the disappearance of the father was the primary reason for the fact that, as one woman put it, "everything has been a problem."

> He was never a provider in the first place, and after he left he never sent money for the child -- I was completely on my own. He wanted custody of the child for the summer and for Christmas. [This was an interfaith marriage.] I said "no" -- not unless he maintained regular child-support payments and weekly visits. He wouldn't. Now I don't even know where he is, and it's a problem because I want to arrange for a get.

The Importance of the Get

Orthodox and Conservative rabbis will not marry a divorced person who has not obtained the religious divorce decree, the get. If a woman without a get marries again, any child of the remarriage will be

illegitimate in Jewish law. The law imposes no such penalty on a man. Should he remarry without a get, a child of that marriage would be legitimate. If a wife refuses to accept the get from her husband, Jewish law provides alternative ways for the man to be declared free to remarry. The woman whose husband refuses to provide a get has no similar recourse. Thus the law places the obligation to obtain a get upon the woman and gives the man a unique advantage in negotiating a divorce settlement.

Ten of the 40 women in the sample had obtained a get at the time of, or subsequent to, their divorces. Most were either Orthodox or Conservative. One of two Reform women who had obtained a get said:

> The rabbi insisted that I must have it to remarry -- if ever I should. My ex paid for it..

The other Reform woman had herself insisted on the get:

> I insisted on an Orthodox get. I had been married religiously in a Conservative synagogue, and it was important to me to have the most religious divorce I could get. He [the ex] would not pay for it, but at least he went through it. His mother can't understand why I wanted it.

An Orthodox woman, living in Israel at the time of her divorce, returned to America with the children before obtaining a get. Her ex-husband promptly sued her for desertion and refused to give her a get. Only after several years of court battles in Israel and heavy financial concessions did she finally obtain the Jewish bill of divorcement -- an absolute "must" for this young Hasidic mother, should she even want to be introduced to a potential mate.

One young woman from the Hasidic community in Flatbush was still trying, after almost five years, to obtain a get.

> I've asked, I've tried, but he just won't do it. I've gone to some local rabbis for help but haven't gotten anywhere. Unfortunately, you need money to get them [the rabbis] to help you, and I don't have it.

Then she added with resignation:

> I guess it really doesn't matter because who's going to marry me anyway with my six children?

Eight women said that they would obtain a get should they decide to remarry. None of them anticipated any difficulty. Fully half of the women in the sample, however, neither requested a get nor had any intention of doing so. Many had never heard of a get; it was simply "not an issue," "irrelevant," "nonsense," or "something that would

never have occurred to us." From the perspective of the traditional Jewish community, should these women remarry and bear children the absence of a get could have serious ramifications when their children, in turn, are ready to marry.*

Sources of Support During the Divorce

1. Formal Supports

During the breakup of their marriages, almost three-fourths of the women and half of the men had sought some form of psychological help -- a psychiatrist, a social worker, a marriage counselor. In some cases, this had been done in an effort to save the marriage. After the divorce, most of the women and about a fifth of the men had sought some form of therapy to help them adjust to their new status.

In a number of instances, both before and after the divorce, professional help was obtained from Jewish communal agencies; in others, from independent professionals. Several women were referred to the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCS):

> I called the Women's Crisis Line and someone there referred me to Federation [JBFCS]. I discovered this wonderful social worker there who saved my life. I was a mess. She was able to calm me down. She helped me to understand how to be a single parent without feeling guilty about leaving my daughter to go to work.

Respondents who turned to Jewish communal agencies such as JBFCS or a Y tended to see these not as "Jewish" institutions but rather as general sources of psychological or social support. One woman said:

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*The Jewish community has taken steps to address the problem of the recalcitrant husband. A number of Orthodox rabbis are now asking couples to sign a simple prenuptial agreement stating that, in the event the marriage is dissolved civilly, both parties will agree to give or receive a get. The Conservative movement has incorporated a prenuptial agreement in its ketubah (marriage contract), and a recent case suggests that the civil courts will enforce such an agreement.

To combat ignorance about the fact that a get is necessary for children of subsequent marriages to be legitimate under Jewish law, as well as to address the problem of the recalcitrant husband, an organization called GET (Getting Equitable Treatment) was formed several years ago in New York City. The organization seeks to assist men and women who are involved in battles over the get, as well as to forestall such problems through community education.

> One of my friends suggested that I go to this group at the 92nd Street YMHA. It was for recently separated and divorced men and women. I found it a big help talking with people who were going through the same thing I was, but there was nothing "Jewish" about it -- even though everyone in the group seemed to be Jewish.

Only eight women and two men said that they had turned to a rabbi when their marriages were breaking up. In fact, when asked whether they had sought or obtained any support from a rabbi, most respondents expressed surprise. "It would never have occurred to me," said one woman. Another was more explicit:

> A rabbi? No -- I would run ten miles before I did that. Rabbis that I've come in contact with have alienated me. They're full of trite phrases and pat answers.

In the earlier study in this series, The Jewish Community and Children of Divorce, rabbis reported that they were rarely consulted before a divorce, and one noted:

> Too many congregants see the rabbi as sitting in judgment about human behavior. The rabbi is considered "holier than thou."

Several respondents in the present study confirmed this. One woman who said she would not go to a rabbi, but did go to a psychologist, remarked:

> It's very important to have someone you can talk to who won't be judgmental. The rabbis only try to send you back, no matter how untenable the situation.

A man who did go to his rabbi was sorry:

> It was one of my great disappointments that he was not able to function in that area. He could not give the support I needed -- he was too moralistic about the sanctity of marriage. I wanted help and support in getting out of the marriage.

Another man concurred:

> I never spoke to my rabbi -- this kind of thing doesn't lend itself to a clergyman. Rabbis are on a one-track course to save marriage at any cost.

It should be noted, however, that of the 10 people who said they had consulted a rabbi, seven had found him helpful. A woman said:

> Our rabbi was a young man whose own parents had divorced when he was only 12 -- the same age as my younger son. He was incredibly supportive to me and the boys.

One woman recalled that the rabbi had tried to bring the couple together:

> But he came to the conclusion that I had no choice except to get a divorce. The rabbi was studying to be a social worker at that time -- a very kind and caring person. My husband wouldn't talk to the rabbi at all, however.

In several instances, the rabbi was helpful in steering one or both of the partners to a social worker or psychologist or in referring them to an agency such as JBFCS for marriage counseling or individual therapy. The rabbis who seemed to be most appreciated were those whose doors were always open:

> The rabbi was always there to talk to me when I needed it. I felt I could call on him at any time. He helped prepare me for life after the divorce. He reaches out to people. I told him what was happening, and he listened. He became very special for me.

This woman's ex-husband agreed the rabbi had been supportive of his wife, but said:

> It's funny -- he never contacted me. I wouldn't have minded at all.

2. Informal Supports

For most of the women in the sample, but for few of the men, friends proved the most helpful informal supports: they listened, they called, they invited, and in many instances they served as role models, having themselves been through divorce. As one woman said:

> My friends were tremendous. I have a wonderful network of women friends who supported me 100 percent without being vindictive toward my ex. They were always there to talk. My married friends included me all the time.

Several women suggested that the friendships made as a couple tended to dissolve after the divorce and that the support they received came from their own women friends. As one put it:

> Most of our friends at that time -- couples -- disappeared as far as I was concerned. But my women friends were

> wonderful. They were behind me in every way, even financially. In a sense, they became my "family." When holidays came around, we'd get together to celebrate them.

That the divorce served as the test by which "you found out who your friends were" was noted by many respondents. Said one woman:

> People I thought were my friends were not. Married couples treated me as though I no longer existed, but I made new friends, and <u>they</u> were supportive.

A man expressed somewhat the same idea:

> I'll tell you, you find out who your friends are. Two couples were a great support, but a lot of friends turned out to be congenial acquaintances. The distinctions became apparent.

Ten of the men, but almost none of the women, said that they really had no friends. Some of these were people who had relocated just prior to the divorce or soon after. But some were self-described "loners."

Some of the respondents could not turn to parents for support during their divorces. Parents had died, lived too far away, or were too old or ill to be called upon.

Among parents who were in regular contact with the respondents, reactions ranged from horror, shame, and embarrassment to wholehearted support and assistance. Fourteen of the women found their parents' reactions extremely negative -- at least at first:

> My family was dreadfully ashamed: "How will we tell the relatives?" And his family were no help at all. They tried to wish it away. In fact, they told me I should frost my hair and buy a filmy negligee and that would get things back together again.

The negative responses came primarily from parents who were Orthodox or traditional Jews. Often, their child's divorce was the first in the family, and it represented a kind of stigma. However, an initially negative response from parents was not predictive of lack of support. As one woman described her situation:

> My parents were devastated. They liked my husband, and they desperately wanted me to work it out -- not to throw in the towel. On the other hand, they were very supportive, couldn't have been better. I couldn't possibly have made it financially without them.

Ten of the 40 women reported that their parents had been "all right," "quite supportive," or "somewhat supportive," and 11 said that they had been "fantastic," "life savers," "1000 percent supportive." In sum, most of the women whose parents were available said that their parents had stood behind them in their decisions and had generously given both emotional and instrumental assistance.

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

The Affiliated

Between the time of the divorce and the time of the interview -- an average of four years -- changes had occurred in the pattern of Jewish affiliation of the people in the sample. As Table 4 indicates, of the 20 families that had been unaffiliated during the marriage, three became affiliated with a Reform temple or school, three with a Conservative synagogue or school, and four with an Orthodox synagogue and day school.* In addition, two families that had been affiliated with an Orthodox synagogue during the marriage identified themselves as Conservative at the time of the interview; another moved from Conservative to Reform and still another from Reform to Conservative. Two of these latter changes stemmed from geographic moves and two from dissatisfaction with a particular Sunday or Hebrew school.

More significant is the finding that, after the divorce, 10 previously unaffiliated families had joined the ranks of the affiliated, while none had moved from affiliated to unaffiliated status. This finding appears to run counter to the belief that divorce necessarily erodes Jewish affiliation and identification. Although the data offered here are too few to refute this belief, these 10 cases suggest factors that may explain the "return" of the unaffiliated. The word "return" is used advisedly because, among the 10 families that had been unaffiliated during the marriage but developed some tie afterward, there were five custodial parents who had grown up in affiliated homes. One woman, for example, who had married a non-Jew against the wishes of her parents, said:

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*The postdivorce "family" is defined as the custodial parent and child(ren).

> When the girls got to be old enough, I decided that they should have some kind of Jewish education. I guess it's a little strange, because during the marriage we really did nothing Jewish. But I find myself getting more and more conservative with age. Maybe it's that being the child of Holocaust parents, I feel a particular responsibility to pass on a Jewish tradition. So now the girls are in a Reform Hebrew school, and we go to services on Friday night. They love it.

Another woman, also divorced from a non-Jew, had similar sentiments:

> The minute my son was old enough, I enrolled him at the nursery school of the Conservative synagogue here. It was highly recommended as a place where there's real Jewish involvement. I wanted him to have this, especially after the absence of all of this with his father. We go to shul all the time, and I'm enrolled in the women's Bat Mitzvah class. When I was young, I never went to Hebrew school -- only my brothers did. My son is very close to my parents [Conservative]. We're with them on all the holidays.

And a third:

> My ex was a country-club type -- golf and cards. He wasn't interested in the synagogue or the community. After the divorce, I decided I wanted my son to have a Jewish upbringing so I enrolled him in the Conservative synagogue nursery school. Now he's in the Hebrew school and will eventually be Bar Mitzvah.

TABLE 4

Change of Affiliation after the Divorce

Affiliation during the marriage	Affiliation after the divorce			
	Orthodox (10)	Conservative (10)	Reform (10)	Unaffiliated (10)
Orthodox (8)	6	2	--	--
Conservative (5)	--	4	1	--
Reform (7)	--	1	6	--
Unaffiliated (20)	4	3	3	10

A fourth "returnee" commented:

> We never belonged to anything during the marriage although occasionally we went to my parents' Conservative synagogue. I put the children in a Conservative Hebrew school just as soon as they were old enough, and we go every Sabbath together. I was brought up in a Conservative synagogue but never went to Hebrew school -- although my brother did. I wanted the children to know what it was all about. In fact, at first I had put them in a religious day school, but they had to leave it as part of the divorce settlement. It was important to my ex that they not go, and it didn't matter that much to me.

And finally:

> I joined a Reform temple after the divorce because I felt it was very important for my son to learn about his Jewish heritage. I myself came from an observant home but didn't have that much of a Jewish education -- my brothers did, but the girls, no!

These women had three things in common: a traditional Jewish home background; a husband who wished to have little to do with Jewish communal life; and a child old enough for some form of religious education. It is possible, of course, that had their marriages remained intact, these women would still have seen to it that their children received some form of Jewish education. However, it appears that the dissolution of their marriages actually removed a barrier to their return to a more traditional Jewish life.

Four women came from completely unaffiliated homes and had been -- as one put it -- "borderline Christians" while married. Three who lived in the Bronx came under the influence of a rabbi well known for his community activism, his personal warmth and understanding, and his readiness to embrace anyone who expressed a desire to lead a traditional Jewish life. The fourth was referred by a friend to a similarly outgoing rabbi on Manhattan's West Side. All four engaged in religious study, became Sabbath observers, koshered their homes, attended synagogue regularly and sent their children to religious day schools.

What moved these four women to take on what has been called "the yoke of Orthodoxy"? In each case the key factor was a charismatic rabbi willing to devote considerable time to the family. As one woman remarked:

> The rabbi is one of the most extraordinary human beings I have ever met -- generous, warm, giving. He is always "there," and he's willing to accept you "where you're at."

Another commented about the same rabbi:

> Someone had told me about this day school, and I liked the way it looked so I decided my son should go. That's how I met the rabbi. He was the one who arranged for the get. I didn't even know such a thing existed. He invited me to come to the shul, and I liked it. He explained to me about being kosher, and I did the house, little by little.

Of the West Side rabbi, a woman said:

> He was incredible. I was a wreck and a friend suggested him to me. I called and he said to come right over and he didn't even know me. He'll talk to you even at two o'clock in the morning. I had started getting interested in Jewish things even before the divorce. Before that it had always been a great source of pride when people would say "you don't look Jewish." The rabbi got me to take courses at the shul and to send my daughter to a day school.

In all 10 families that moved from unaffiliated to affiliated status, it was the mother who, after the divorce, established the synagogue affiliation, enrolled the children in a religious school, and initiated observance in the home. These women did not have to deal with their ex-husbands about matters of Jewish observance and affiliation. But those fathers who still saw their children regularly did not object to the new patterns of observance and affiliation. One father commented:

> It's true that my ex has become quite involved Jewishly because of the children. But no, it hasn't been a problem for me. I try to encourage the girls. I pick them up from Hebrew school when it's my day. I took them to shul on Purim -- I even made their costumes.

One father, whose ex-wife had become increasingly Orthodox, expressed some ambivalence over the fact that she and the children had grown so observant:

> I have no real Jewish ties myself, but I'm very proud of my children. They have strong ties. They speak Hebrew, and they go to a yeshiva. I'm not that involved in their schooling because of the divorce and being an absentee father. The big problem is that I do not have a kosher home and recently their mother made their home 110 percent kosher. Now they won't eat in mine.

A father who had himself grown up in an Orthodox home noted:

> When we got married, I had had my fill of religion, and I moved completely away from it -- no synagogue affiliation. But since the divorce, my wife has gotten very involved, and our son is at a yeshiva. The rabbi there is very special -- he believes in bringing people back in any way that he can. As a result, I find that I've slowly been moving back to religion over the past few years.

Every family that had been affiliated during the marriage retained an affiliation after the divorce. Children who had been attending Sunday or Hebrew school, day school or yeshiva, continued their Jewish education at least until their Bar Mitzvahs or Bat Mitzvahs. Since generally it was the mother who had custody, she was the one who met with teachers and attended parent meetings, Hebrew school plays, and special Sabbath programs. In several instances, however, the father, rather than the mother, took the lead in ensuring the continued affiliation and participation of the children. For example, one father said:

> During the marriage, I guess you might say we sank to the lower common denominator -- hers. Whatever minimal observance there was was because of the children. Now I go to synagogue more than ever, and I'm the one that supervises the children's Jewish education. I spend a lot more time with my parents, and when I have the children on a weekend I take them to my parents' synagogue.

One mother was quite explicit about the fact that she felt that the children's Jewish education was their father's responsibility:

> I occasionally go to the temple on a Sabbath with the children, but I decided that I did not want control over that whole area. As part of the divorce, I gave that responsibility -- the kids' Jewish education -- to him. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. I felt I had enough responsibility in other areas. I wouldn't say "don't go," but I wanted him to take control. I make my ex drive the car pools for all the kids' Jewish activities.

Her ex-husband confirmed this:

> I live in the city, but I drive out to Long Island four times a week to see the children. Twice a week, I pick up my son from Hebrew school at the temple and then take both kids for supper. On Saturdays I participate with them in a special parent-child religious and education program at the temple. Then on Sunday I come out again, and pick up my daughter from Sunday school and take the kids for the day.

This father was clearly exerting every possible effort to keep his children identified and affiliated Jewishly. Why did he do it?

> My wife doesn't give a damn about it. But I was brought up with the synagogue playing a very vital role in my life. It was a central focus for my parents -- they actually founded this synagogue in Brooklyn and their lives revolved around it. It was important to me that when I walked in, everyone knew who I was!

Contrary to the belief that divorce is a major factor in the erosion of Jewish affiliation and identity, the sample in this study presented no case of a family disaffiliating after the breakup of the marriage. It is true that a number of men and women became synagogue or temple dropouts, particularly after their children passed the age of Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah. But children who had attended Hebrew or Sunday school before their parents' divorce continued to do so after. And among the previously unaffiliated, fully half moved to affiliated status and provided some form of religious education for their children.

The Unaffiliated

At the time of the interviews, 10 custodial parents classified themselves as unaffiliated. None attended religious services except for an occasional visit to a temple during the High Holy Days, and even that was rare. Nevertheless, several of these parents maintained some institutional ties to the Jewish community. A West Side mother explained:

> The children go to the community Hebrew school. It's good because no one pounds you. Once in a while, they go to services there. I say "Go if you want to." My ex stuck them in this school and then wouldn't pay the tuition. I was ready to take them out, but then they told me they'd take both boys for free. It didn't matter to me -- they'll do anything to keep those kids there.

Another unaffiliated mother said:

> Our older son was 11 at the time of the divorce. I wanted to have him Bar Mitzvah for my father's sake, but I couldn't find any place that would condense the preparation time. Our son really wasn't that interested so the end result was no Bar Mitzvah. When it came to our younger son, he really wanted it, so we joined a temple just until the Bar Mitzvah. There was no pressure to continue. They were very low-key.

A third unaffiliated mother had a son attending a Hebrew school connected with an Orthodox synagogue. She said:

> I feel anger, fury and, on the other hand, sheer delight about it. His education is at an Orthodox synagogue. A lot

of my son's friends were going there, and he wanted to go, too. It's like a congregation of disaffected Jews. "If you want to come, fine, if not, I wish you would, but no hard feelings." I don't really have much to do with it. The rabbi is an ardent Zionist, and while he's totally accepting of one's own brand of Judaism, he wants you to be a Zionist, and that I'm not.

Several unaffiliated parents noted that they were considering Jewish education for their children. One mother commented:

> Now that she's 10, I think I would like her to have some Jewish education. No Hebrew, and nothing religious -- just cultural. The problem is that it would have to be during the week only -- no weekends, because we rotate weekends, and I don't think my ex would go for that.

And another:

> My son, nine and a half years old, keeps telling me that he wants to go to Hebrew school. All his peers go, and he wants to "belong." I'm thinking about it. I guess it's important for my son to have a sense of belonging now with his father away and separate from him. Maybe it's particularly important for a boy -- Bar Mitzvah represents a turning point in a boy's life.

With few exceptions, parents who identified themselves as unaffiliated spoke positively about Judaism. A woman put it this way:

> I have a keen emotional sense of being Jewish. It's important for me to be identified as a Jew. So many thousands of years that a people has survived! I have a sympathy and empathy for my people that I want to pass on to my children.

A man who had been married to a non-Jewish woman said:

> Since the divorce, I feel that I've become closer to things Jewish. I've become more cognizant of Jewish tradition and, as a single parent, I feel a responsibility to provide some of this for the kids. For example, I have them every other weekend, and I light candles with them, saying the prayer. Sometimes we do it at my parents; sometimes they each have a friend over, but often it's just the three of us -- the kids and me. I also think that as I've gotten a bit older, I've been able to reflect on the traditions and they have become more valuable to me.

Another parent mused:

> I see a change in myself in recent years. I feel intensely, increasingly Jewish. Nothing to do with organized religion, but I tend to think more and more in terms of "is it good or bad for the Jews?"

Thus even among those who were unaffiliated and disinterested in organized religion, there existed a sense of identification as Jews, sympathy for Jewish causes, and attachment to Jewish traditions.

Obstacles to Community Participation

Most families in the sample maintained, and some increased, existing ties to the Jewish community after the divorce. A number reported excellent experiences that illustrate how the Jewish community can reach out to single parents and their children. A majority of the respondents, however, mentioned obstacles to participation in Jewish communal life as a result of their changed marital status. Finances posed one kind of barrier. But equally, if not more, serious were lack of social support and a sense of stigmatization.

1. Financial Obstacles

Most of the rabbis and school personnel interviewed for The Jewish Community and Children of Divorce had insisted that no one was forced to drop out of synagogue or Hebrew or day school for financial reasons. While interviews with parents in this study confirmed that none had left because of inability to pay, several respondents -- particularly mothers -- explained that the synagogue's financial policy had prevented them from joining in the first place. One said:

> I've seen Judaism lose children for financial reasons. At the temple that I first thought I would join after my divorce, I found that they charged the same amount for me as for a couple with several children, so I never joined. Frankly, I could have afforded it, but it was the principle. And there are a lot of people who are embarrassed to ask for special consideration or to say "I can't afford that much."

Another said that lack of money had made it impossible for her to give her son a Jewish education:

> Jewish education for the children is always on my mind. I've asked a lot of people about it. I spoke to someone, and she said it would cost "thus and so." I spoke to a rabbi I happen to know, and he had no suggestions because I simply can't afford the money either for a temple membership or for a Jewish education. Without the money, it just doesn't seem to be possible.

Several were grateful that after the divorce their children were able to continue in the day school on scholarships, but one noted:

> I have a scholarship which gives me one-third off, but every chance that they get, they throw the scholarship in your face. They have bingo, and if you're on scholarship you're supposed to help out, but it's during the day, and I can't go. They said, "It's your obligation; you're on scholarship, you know." I find that very degrading. Do they think I want to be on scholarship?

Despite the ability to pay, several mothers said that they felt financially inferior. One explained:

> They treat you like a second-class citizen. Those with the money get the best seats and treatment. And in the Hebrew school, it was the same thing. If my son was absent from school, it was a problem. If it was a rich member's son, they overlooked it. That's why I eventually dropped out of that synagogue and joined a different one.

Another woman stated that after the divorce her daughter was given a scholarship at the day school she had been attending, but:

> I find it very hard, and so does my daughter, because we're not in the same "station" as the others. The kids and the parents at the school and the shul can afford things that we just can't. It's not that anyone treats us badly -- it's just knowing that we can't do the things that they can do.

These perceptions of second-class status may or may not have been rooted in reality, but they were widely felt and frequently voiced.

2. Lack of Outreach

More common than financial complaints among respondents were feelings that the synagogue or temple could do far more "reaching out" to the single parent and child, both at the time of the divorce and after. All denominations were criticized in this respect. Said one woman bitterly about the neighborhood Reform temple:

> Support from the temple at the time of the divorce? No -- it never occurred to the rabbi to call me. He spoke with my husband -- but, of course, my husband had been a member of the board of directors for 10 years. It certainly would have been nice, considering the fact that I had also been involved in that temple for 10 years, if they had encouraged me to stay on as a member. I would have been receptive. But I was just seen as an appendage. In the Jewish com-

munity, you don't belong to anything unless you pay -- and that really bothers me. You suddenly become nothing once you get divorced -- even though you were completely involved for the 10 years while you were married.

Said one woman about the suburban Reform temple that she still attended:

I must say that the temple did not reach out to us at all. When we "fell out," no one followed up. They never tried. I was right there kind of waving for their attention, but they never touched me. It's too bad -- they put all their efforts into the strong supporters, the regulars. They should try to reach the hesitants, like us.

Her ex-husband confirmed this:

I used to go regularly to classes at the temple. But after the divorce, they did not reach out in any way, shape or form -- except to ask me to pay the bills. Then when I couldn't pay -- no response. Nothing! The rabbi never said a word. He made no overtures, never said "Would you like to come in and talk?" or "How are you doing?" or "My door is open."

Complaints about lack of outreach on the part of Orthodox institutions were expressed less frequently, but they did occur. These words from a successful woman executive echoed some of the comments above:

No, the shul has never reached out to me. As a matter of fact, I'll probably be dropping my membership there because a group of us are starting our own havurah-type service -- Conservative. It's funny, though -- I have so much in the way of business contacts and experience I could have contributed, but they never called on me.

Her ex-husband put it this way:

At the time, we went to the rabbi and told him what was happening. He helped with the get, but that was the end of it. That was the last we heard from him except requests for money. I was really angry because he knew what was happening, and not once did he call me -- nothing. It was a tremendous void for me.

Generally, after a divorce, it is the man who leaves the household and finds housing elsewhere. Several fathers said that they would have appreciated some attempt on the part of the rabbi in the new neighborhood to draw them into the synagogue or temple. One said:

> When I first joined the new temple -- largely so that my daughter could go to Hebrew school there -- I told them my situation and made arrangements about dues, mail, tuition bills, and everything. I go to services regularly, but the rabbi has never approached me.

Another father noted:

> I was really surprised that the rabbi did not make any effort at all to draw me in after the divorce. First of all, I hear that he has a degree in psychology so he should know better. And secondly, he himself was divorced so he should understand what it feels like to suddenly find yourself alone.

3. Stigmatization

Lack of outreach efforts was usually blamed on the rabbi. Many respondents, however, spoke about their general sense of discomfort as single parents in the synagogue or school, of "feeling different," of not being welcomed by the congregation or other parents. As one woman put it:

> They're all rich and married. I feel like an outcast. And nobody tries to make me feel comfortable.

Another explained in more detail:

> I'm thinking of dropping my membership. As I see it, the temple [Reform] is regarded as the exclusive province of the family. The widowed or divorced are seen as obstacles -- maybe even as threats. At times, I feel almost ostracized. Let me give you just one subtle example. I used to be a frequent reader of the Haftorah [weekly reading from the Prophets]; since my divorce almost four years ago, I have not been asked once.

The problem is particularly critical for the Orthodox divorced woman, according to one such respondent:

> Divorced fathers get very different treatment than divorced mothers. The whole attitude is different. You should see how respectfully the teachers at the children's yeshiva treat the fathers when they come into the school. Part of it is probably money, but that shouldn't mean that the mother should get less respect. Some of the teachers give you a look as if to say "What more can we expect from these children since their mother is divorced?" That attitude is all wrong.

She went on to note how difficult it is for an Orthodox woman when it comes to observance of the Sabbath and holidays:

> The problem is that there is very little place for the Jewish woman in the Jewish community, particularly if you're Orthodox. Orthodoxy is very male-oriented. Comes Shabbos or the holidays and you're alone with your kids. It's no fun trying to make Kiddush and sing zmirot [Sabbath songs] or light the menorah by yourself -- though I really try to do it. And in shul, the fathers are around with their kids. My nine-year-old son is too old to be sitting with me, but he has no one to sit with so he just runs around the shul and plays.

A woman blamed the rabbi for the problems of single parents at her Reform temple:

> Shortly after the divorce, a new rabbi came in. He is a jackass! He is into religion, but not into people. He has been no help at all. There happens to be a huge singles population at the temple, and several of us tried to put together a singles group, but we got no help from him. That place is for couples only. It has cliques, too. If you'e not married, you can't be comfortable there. The rabbi said that organizations at the temple have to be cost-effective and that a singles group would not be.

The fathers, too, expressed discomfort as single parents in the synagogue. As one observed:

> There seems to be something inherent in Judaism that means a mass denial about divorce. When it happens, it's something shameful, a disgrace. People try to pretend that there's nothing wrong, and as a result they ignore you and the pain you're going through.

As these men and women spoke of the discomfort and aloneness they felt in the synagogue, several acknowledged that the problem was not present only there. One man said:

> Sure it's hard. They're all couples at the temple, and it's a lonely feeling. But it's lonely being single in the temple, in the Jewish community, or anywhere I go. It's just lonely being single!

Positive Experiences

Although most respondents had negative feelings about the failure of the synagogue or the community to reach out to them, several had

only praise and appreciation for the ways they and their children had been drawn in and made to feel comfortable. Said one about the Reform suburban temple to which she belonged:

> The rabbi was extremely supportive of me and the children after the divorce. He tried to pay special attention to the children. He made a point of talking to them about things that interested them -- like baseball. I was on the PTA board at the time, and he insisted that I continue. He encouraged me to remain active, to come to services Friday night, work in the PTA. He made me feel that I was as good as everyone else!

Two Orthodox institutions, one in Manhattan and one in the Bronx, were warmly praised. One woman described the atmosphere:

> The shul [in Manhattan] made a real effort to pull me in, as well as to pull in the boys, who were going to Hebrew school there. They have separate fees for single parents that are adjusted according to your ability to pay. They are warm, congenial. They never make you feel pitiable or like a sore thumb. For example, they keep asking my son to usher at the services, and they are always giving him aliyahs [blessings over the Torah]. I'm telling you -- they never leave us alone. They make sure to keep us involved.

About the synagogue in the Bronx, a mother said:

> I love the shul. It's such a warm place. The men are wonderful to my son. For example, they make sure to put him on their shoulders and carry him around on Simchat Torah. It's little things like that, but they're important. They make him feel so welcome that he really loves going there.

Occasionally, one respondent praised and another criticized the same temple or synagogue. Perceptions vary, of course, and experiences as well. But one factor may be, as some respondents pointed out, the receptivity and behavior of the individual. The suggestion was made, for example, that the single parent has a responsibility to take some initiative. One said:

> There's just so much a synagogue can do for a single parent. As difficult as it is, it's important that we make ourselves get out there and push ourselves a little so we'll get accepted, invited, and involved. I did it, and it worked.

Another suggested:

> I think it has less to do with the synagogue than with the woman herself. You can't sit around and wait for the

synagogue to come to you. If you want to be involved, you have to stop kvetching and go out and do it!

These comments underscore the fact that the individual as well as the synagogue has an outreach responsibility. Nevertheless, the extent to which the synagogue or temple reaches out and welcomes the single-parent family will probably determine whether that family will remain involved in the Jewish community.

The Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah

In The Jewish Community and Children of Divorce, rabbis identified a range of problems -- financial, ceremonial, social, psychological -- that may confront the postdivorce couple at the time of their child's Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah. In the present study, the parents themselves were asked how they had coped with this event if it had occurred after their divorce. Parents with youngsters between nine and 12 were asked if they had given any thought to the event and, if so, what their expectations and plans were (Table 5).

Twelve families did not participate in this part of the interview. In four instances a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah had occurred before the divorce. In four others, the child was not yet nine. Four sets of parents said that they did not expect to observe this ceremony: two were unaffiliated and "simply not interested"; two others were Orthodox families with young daughters and, as one mother put it, "In our circle, girls are not Bat Mitzvah."

A total of 15 families had celebrated a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah after the parents' divorces. Five felt that things had gone very well. Recalled one mother:

> Our son's Bar Mitzvah went beautifully, largely because of the rabbi's sensitivity. For example, normally the father and the mother sit next to each other on the pulpit, but he arranged for us to sit on opposite sides. It also helped that his father's woman friend did not come. We each invited our own friends, and our son invited the entire religious school class. So there was a head table of fourteen boys, and that made our son feel good.

In another family, while the mother was very pleased about the way things had gone, the father was even more so:

> The Bar Mitzvah was wonderful. Our son was really a delight. He ran the entire ceremony with great dignity. He was obviously on top of it and thoroughly enjoying himself. It was his -- a wonderful event. My mother came, and she loved

TABLE 5

Experience and Expectations Concerning the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah (by Family)

Experience	15
Went well	5
Some problems	6
Many problems	4
Expectations	13
Few or no problems	5
Many problems	8
Not applicable	12
Occurred before divorce	4
Child too young	4
None planned	4
Total	40

it. Though she and my ex-wife had never gotten along, they both behaved well toward each other.

In six cases, the parent(s) reported a few problems. One father related:

> The Bat Mitzvah took place shortly after the divorce, and I must say that although it went all right, I felt that it was a great source of acrimony in that postdivorce period. Still, we tried not to take our own problems out on our daughter.

A young mother from Borough Park was ambivalent:

> Our younger son's Bar Mitzvah was two years ago -- after the divorce. It was very difficult. My husband came in from out of town, but he refused to give a cent. My parents and I paid for the whole thing. My son was very tense about how his father would act and what kinds of scenes might occur.

On the other hand, she added:

> Around here, people make very fancy Bar Mitzvahs -- big parties, lots of flowers, a band. We just made a simple

Kiddush and then a party at home for his class. What was beautiful was how supportive the boys in his class were -- they kept saying that our Bar Mitzvah was just as nice as all the fancy ones.

In four cases, the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah provoked many problems. One mother explained:

> The Bar Mitzvah itself didn't go too badly. We divided the aliyahs and for our son's sake we tried very hard to behave civilly. But up until the day itself, it was a difficult time. My ex absolutely didn't want a Bar Mitzvah, while my son wanted one like crazy. We had terrible fights over money since my ex thought the whole thing was unnecessary. In the end, he paid for half, but he really gave me a hard time.

The father's side of the story was somewhat different:

> It's not that I didn't want a Bar Mitzvah -- I just didn't want one of those big, fancy affairs. I wanted to take my son to Israel instead and just have a small affair here. But his mother wouldn't let him go. So in the end, it was the big, fancy affair, and I got stuck paying for half of it.

Eight families with children between nine and 12 contemplated the approaching Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah with anxiety and concern. The mother of a nine-year-old said:

> I worry about everything already. A Bar Mitzvah is usually a big function -- 100 to 150 people, and I don't know many people. Whom will I invite? I don't have a wide circle of friends anymore. Also, I guess my ex should be there, but I don't think I'd want that. And then, there's the cost -- who is going to pay?

One mother was concerned because she had never been affiliated with a synagogue and she had no idea how to go about planning a Bar Mitzvah:

> My son, who is almost 10, has just decided that he wants a Bar Mitzvah, but there are all kinds of problems. I don't know anything about synagogues here, whether you have to belong or not if you're having a Bar Mitzvah. Frankly, neither his father nor I care about it at all, but if that's what our son wants, I guess we can't deny him. I worry, too, about how much such a thing will cost, although I guess his father will take care of it. He can afford it.

In another case, both mother and father were bitter about the forthcoming Bar Mitzvah of their son. Said the mother:

> The Bar Mitzvah is next year, and his father will not be there. I won't let him come because I've been left with all of the responsibility that should have been his. I resent it terribly. All and any costs relating to a Bar Mitzvah will fall on my shoulders, so why should I let him come?

The father said:

> I'm afraid I won't be involved next year when my son's Bar Mitzvah takes place. She wanted me to pay for it, and she wanted it to take place at the Tavern on the Green. I said absolutely not because my whole family is kosher, and I think it would be a slap in the face to them to have it there. So I said "Have it where you want, but pay for it yourself." I'd rather not make a fuss because it's only our son who will suffer.

Five families anticipated the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah with pleasure. One father said:

> We'll make the Bat Mitzvah a very simple affair, just as our older's was, before the divorce. I'm sure it will go fine.

A mother who looked forward to the Bar Mitzvah of her son in two years said:

> My ex and I get along very well. We're very friendly, so I know it won't be a problem.

Several couples reported that at the time of an older child's Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah they had already decided to separate. These parents postponed their divorces until after the ceremony so as not to mar the occasion for the child or for their respective families, underscoring the fact that many Jews -- Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and even unaffiliated -- view the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah as a significant event.

THE PARENTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

Respondents were asked what they thought or hoped the Jewish community might do for single-parent families.* On the whole, unaffiliated men and women did not see the Jewish community as a source of support for themselves as single parents, and most had nothing to suggest on that subject. As one put it:

> It's really irrelevant. I'm not part of the Jewish community, and I don't look to it for support. My friends are my support.

Another unaffiliated woman expanded:

> I'm for Jewish causes and I feel very attached to being Jewish. But although religion is vital to me, it's a personal thing. So, I don't look to the Jewish community in a time of crisis, just as I wouldn't expect the West Side community to help me, or the teachers' association, or whoever else I happen to be. I tend to rely on my close friends for help and support.

On the other hand, almost every affiliated respondent had some suggestion regarding the role of the Jewish community vis-a-vis the single parent. Their recommendations fall into three categories: those that address the needs of the child; those that focus on the needs of

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*The comments that follow reveal a tendency on the part of respondents to equate "Jewish community" with the synagogue and/or Hebrew school. This may be a bias of the sample itself, which was largely drawn from New York City. In suburbs and smaller cities, single parents may be more likely to look for support and outreach from the Jewish community center, around which Jewish communal life tends to revolve.

the single parent; and those that call on the Jewish community to change its values relative to divorce and the single-parent family.

Recommendations Concerning the Child

Ten respondents, nine women and one man, emphasized the need for activities geared toward the children in divorced families. One woman, for example, noted that she wanted to provide some form of Jewish education for her child but had been unable to find a school that had classes only on weekdays:

> That makes it difficult for the divorced parent, because Saturday and Sunday are usually the father's time, and fathers don't want to give this up. Why not provide weekday-only classes?

Another parent emphasized the financial problems involved in providing religious education for the children:

> The Jewish community has to make it easier for a Jewish child to get an education. They must make special provisions for the child from a single-parent family.

Echoing this theme was the mother who said:

> Without money, it seems impossible to get a Jewish education for your child. So unless one is totally devoted to the idea, it's going to go by the wayside if the Jewish community doesn't do something about it.

An Orthodox woman suggested that synagogues institute Big Brother programs for young boys from divorced homes in the community:

> First of all, there's the problem of my son having someone to sit with in shul. He's too old to sit with me and too young for the Youth Minyan. Perhaps they should have a Big Brother program for shul, and maybe even for after school. I'm not good at things like athletics, and it would be nice if there were someone who could take him to the gym or the park.

At least six parents stressed the importance of activities for single parents, <u>together with their children</u>, especially around the holidays. Said one mother:

> The synagogue might organize and sponsor a network of people who could have a Seder together. Since the divorce, my Seder has shrunk to next to nothing, and the children and I feel

this. It's particularly difficult around holiday time, and the synagogues could help.

Another mother commented:

> Organized activities for single parents are one thing. But it's very important to have activities which include the children, for example at Hanukkah time. That way, the children get to celebrate the holidays with others, and you're not alone.

A father had a different idea:

> I would like to see the synagogue arrange for discussion groups for divorced fathers and, at the same time, for the children who are old enough to participate. That way, the children can see that others have similar problems.

The value of activities for single parents together with their children is suggested by the enthusiasm of two parents who had attended a five-day "camp" cosponsored by the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith Camps. Said one mother:

> I can't tell you how significant those five days were in terms of my own and the children's Jewishness. It made me feel that it's okay to be a single parent in the Jewish community, and it was wonderful for the children, sharing experiences with others from divorced homes. We're still friendly with several of the families who were at the camp. I'll tell you, single parents are very hungry to be in a family situation together. I must say that the camp experience really turned me on again to my Jewishness. I've started to go more often to temple.

Another parent who had been at the camp said:

> Federation paid for my daughter and myself to attend this camp. All of us were single parents, men and women, in a very strong Jewish atmosphere. You know, Friday night and Shabbos. I really had never experienced anything like this, and I found it very moving. I've tried to continue it since we got home. And it was wonderful for my daughter. In fact, the most beautiful thing was the children. Somehow, they sensed a bond from the very beginning. From a Jewish point of view, it was an eye-opener for my daughter, and she loved it. As a group we became very close, and we've gotten together four times since the summer. This is the kind of thing we single parents need -- opportunities to socialize, with our children, in a Jewish context.

Recommendations Concerning the Single Parent

Parents were quite explicit about what the Jewish community might do to help them deal with their needs and concerns. Several spoke of counseling not only at the time of the divorce but after it and suggested that synagogues provide referrals to services such as those available at the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services.

An Orthodox woman called attention to the need for career and employment counseling to help women like herself who suddenly must go back to work. Other women saw marital counseling as particularly important before marriage. One said, for example:

> Synagogues and other Jewish institutions could play much more of a role in premarital counseling, so that you could learn something about marriage before you get into it. It's like preventative health care, I suppose.

Another woman, whose ex-spouse was not Jewish, agreed:

> It's important that rabbis talk to those who are converting just for the sake of the marriage and tell them that it's very difficult. Jews have this "something" in them -- call it "yiddishkeit" -- and they are not going to change. I wish I had had someone to tell me that people who marry out of their faith have just one more obstacle against them.

A number of respondents, particularly men, suggested that the Jewish community recognize the need for support groups for single parents. One father put it this way:

> When a former couple is thrust into the singles world, it's the man who loses. It's not as hard for women; they can rap, get emotional, cry. Men aren't allowed to cry. The Jewish community should help men get together to talk, for support. The women at least have the kids, while men have lost their families and have generally had to move. We need supports. The Jewish community should be doing this to help men like myself in these trying times. If they can't, at least they should be able to refer us to some programs that can.

An Orthodox father echoed this plea:

> I wish I had had other single-parent men to talk to. You know, men don't talk much, and most of the men I knew were married. I felt lost at the time of the divorce. I couldn't relate to single men, that is, men without children. They're different. At tough times you need someone who can be in your skin. This is what the Jewish community should be doing.

Women, too, spoke of the need for support groups to which the Jewish single parent could turn. An Orthodox woman said:

> I wish the Jewish community could help us more. There's a need for support groups, especially for Orthodox women. Maybe something could be done to get Orthodox women from different shuls together since there aren't that many of us at any one shul. We need that kind of thing.

The calls for help from the Jewish community in the form of counseling services and support groups tended to come from those who had been divorced less than three years. Later, priorities change, and most men and women look to single-parent groups for more than support. A number of parents spoke of the need for the Jewish community to provide opportunities for single parents to meet potential marriage partners. About half had tried such groups as Parents Without Partners (PWP), where single parents could meet, discuss common problems, and socialize. Appraisals of these groups were uniformly negative. As one woman explained:

> I tried PWP, but it was a shoddy group of people. Then I tried some of the private parties. They have good activities like workshops, cocktail parties, bowling or picking apples with the children on Sundays. But there's no Jewish orientation -- nothing -- even though 95 percent of the people who go there are Jewish.

Another woman recalled of PWP:

> The men were all over 50, and they looked as though they had been pulled out of institutions. They're all looking for young girls. They have discussions that could be interesting except that they're on a very low level. Besides, there's nothing Jewish about it -- no Jewish content.

Synagogue-affiliated groups fared little better. A woman said:

> I went to one of those things at an Orthodox synagogue. It's just not for me. I know I'm attractive, but I don't like using my looks that way. It's not that I wouldn't like the kind of men there, because I'd like to meet someone who's observant. But most of the really terrific men, observant or not, don't have to go to singles parties.

Another commented about synagogue groups:

> Part of me wants to meet someone through respectable channels such as the temple. But part of me says that anyone I'd meet that way would be a "shlepper." Slick people go to bars, and the shleppers go to temple.

A man noted that one of the problems of the singles parties he had attended, whether synagogue-sponsored or not, was that they didn't distinguish between singles and single parents:

> There's a big difference. The singles are all very self-centered, part of the "me" generation. And they're usually a lot younger. Single parents are a different breed. We're more seasoned. We've had children. We have responsibilities. I know it's hard because of the numbers, so you probably have to mix the two. But it makes it more difficult to meet the right kind of person.

Still, the question "Where does one meet a nice Jewish man?" arose time and time again as women spoke of their desire to remarry. Several mentioned the need for some kind of matchmaking service under Jewish auspices. One commented:

> If the Jewish community is concerned about the divorce rate and intermarriage, it should be more active in helping people to meet each other. Many people want to remarry -- most, I'd bet. The Jewish community should become more active as a resource center for introducing people. Not that one synagogue can do it alone. Maybe a few synagogues should pool resources.

On Manhattan's West Side, members of the Orthodox community, several of whom have remarried after being divorced, periodically hold small luncheons, dinners, or open houses for Orthodox singles, including single parents. One such respondent reported:

> I know several women who are divorced, and periodically we invite them for Friday night dinner or Shabbos lunch. But last year, we hosted a singles party on a Sunday. There are several of us here on the West Side who have done this. The parties are not too large -- 30 or 40 people -- and we try to make sure that the people who are invited will be compatible. Somehow, I think people feel less uncomfortable meeting in the more informal atmosphere of a home setting than in a synagogue banquet hall.

Several single parents said that the responsibility for outreach worked both ways. As one woman put it:

> I go regularly to the synagogue with my children, and I have no problem about it at all. I do not even see myself as a "single parent." I'm simply "not married," and that's the way I want to stay until I meet the right person at the right time. I don't need or want the synagogue for that; I have a large circle of friends, and I'm constantly meeting new

people. It's not the Jewish community's responsibility. It's the woman's own responsibility to put her life together after a divorce. I have no patience for the kvetchers who sit at home waiting for someone to reach out!

An Orthodox woman who had remarried observed:

> I agree that there's a very real problem and that the Jewish community is not meeting it. But single parents can't sit back and wait for the Jewish community to do something. They have to organize themselves. They have to reach out, push themselves. I know it's hard -- I went through it -- but they have to make the effort.

Recommendations Concerning Community Values

At least one in three respondents, at one point or another during the interview, spoke of the need for the Jewish community, and rabbis in particular, to face the fact that Jewish people divorce and that single-parent families are a constituency of their synagogues. One father, a nonpracticing rabbi himself, said:

> Synagogues and schools ought to be changing their assumptions. They still take the intact family for granted and have clearly not adjusted to the fact that, at one and the same time, divorce is shrinking some families and, as single parents remarry, enlarging others. Adjustments have to be made in both cases, and Jewish institutions have not even begun to address this fact.

Another man echoed this:

> The issue of divorce is here, unfortunately, and it is not going to go away. It has to be addressed by rabbis in their sermons, by teachers in the Hebrew schools, by Jews everywhere. It can no longer be hidden under the rug.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study is the third in a series investigating the impact of divorce on Jewish families' religious affiliations and community participation.

The 40 postdivorce families selected for study included equal numbers of Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and unaffiliated families. Interviews with 40 women and 25 of their former husbands explored the families' ties to the Jewish community both before and after the dissolution of their marriages.

During their marriages, eight couples had been Orthodox, five Conservative, seven Reform, and 20 unaffiliated. In 23 cases (including five interfaith marriages) the partners had come from dissimilar religious backgrounds. These marriages tended to take on the religious coloration of the less observant partner. In 11 of these 23, as well as three in which the partners had come from similar backgrounds, issues of religion and observance contributed to the divorce.

Some of the divorces were caused by behavioral problems such as abuse, infidelity, and alcoholism. Others were explained as consequences of "incompatibility" -- differences of temperament or values. Almost all were affected by a social climate reflecting expanded occupational opportunities for women, a high valuation placed on self-fulfillment, and ready acceptance of divorce.

At the time of their divorces, most of the women (but few of the men) found friends and parents supportive. Most of the women (and some of the men) sought professional counseling or therapy. Some turned to Jewish communal agencies (although they did not think of the agencies as "Jewish"). Only ten individuals sought counseling from their rabbis. A number believed their rabbis were unequipped to help, judgmental or too committed to preserving the marriage.

Custodial parents who had been religiously affiliated during their marriages remained affiliated afterward, though a few changed their affiliation. Ten formerly unaffiliated custodial parents joined synagogues or temples after their divorces -- four Orthodox, three Conservative, three Reform. Half of these new affiliations represented "returnees" to the community, since the custodial parents had come from affiliated homes. For the other half, the affiliations represented new commitments to the Jewish community.

The presence of young children in the postdivorce family was largely responsible for the family's continued or new congregational affiliation. All affiliated parents were concerned that their children have a Jewish education, at least to the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah. Even among the unaffiliated, a number of children were enrolled in religious schools either because of a concerned parent or because of the examples of the child's peers. There had been Bar Mitzvahs or Bat Mitzvahs in four predivorce and 15 postdivorce families; 13 other postdivorce families were planning one in the near future.

Many single parents complained of obstacles to their participation in the Jewish community after their divorces. Some found it difficult to pay for congregational membership and religious-school tuition, and they resented the "second-class status" they felt in their straited circumstances. Some complained of lack of outreach on the part of rabbis and congregations who, they charged, were either uninformed or unconcerned about the needs and sensibilities of single-parent families. Some felt a stigma in being divorced and single in congregations geared to married couples.

They recommended that synagogues and schools be more aware of the special problems of children of divorce, including the need for parent-child activities within a Jewish context; that the community develop formal or informal mechanisms to provide emotional support to single parents and to facilitate their remarriage; and that Jewish institutions of all kinds recognize that single-parent families are a significant and permanent part of their constituencies.

Although the sample of 40 divorced couples was too small to permit any generalizations, the study suggests that divorce does not necessarily result in erosion of Jewish identity and community involvement but may, especially for families with young children, open the way for a restoration or strengthening of Jewish affiliation. The determining factor may well be the warmth and sensitivity with which the synagogue, temple or other Jewish institution welcomes and involves such single-parent families.

In the conference that followed publication of The Jewish Community and Children of Divorce, the present authors suggested that some rabbis, particularly among the Orthodox, are concerned that

efforts to deal with the single-parent family may be seen as condoning, even encouraging, divorce. Said one rabbi at the conference:

> A problem which emerges from giving special treatment to single parents in relation to institutional activities and fees is the loss of the couple advantage. The subtle indication of approval which emerges from such a response may shift the pro-family balance which is part of the Jewish value system.

While this concern is understandable, it is self-defeating. The divorce rate among Jews has risen, and even among the Orthodox divorced families have become increasingly visible. These families face all the problems associated with the breakup of marriage and, in addition, find, all too often, that the Jewish community is indifferent and unresponsive to their plight. Programs of premarital and marital counseling may help to reduce the incidence of divorce among Jews, but it will not make the problem go away. Single-parent families are a growing segment of the community. Their needs must be recognized, acknowledged and addressed.

APPENDIX

Interview Guide

We are studying the needs and concerns of Jewish divorced people with school-age children. We are particularly interested to know whether and in what ways you have found the Jewish community (synagogue or temple, religious school, other institutions) understanding and supportive of you. We would like to know how you think the Jewish community could be more helpful to single-parent families like yours.

1. First, some background questions:

    a. How long were you married?

    b. When were you separated or divorced?

    c. How many children do you have, and how old are they?

    d. What is your educational, occupational, and religious background? Your former spouse's?

2. Now, some questions about the period of your marriage:

    a. Were you a member of a synagogue or temple?

    b. How often did you attend services? Did you attend alone, with your former spouse, with your children?

    c. Did you participate in any other synagogue or temple activities?

    d. What was the nature of your religious observance (if any) at home -- e.g., kashrut, candles, kiddush, Seder, sukkah?

    e. Did your child(ren) attend religious school? What was the nature of the school -- e.g., Hebrew school, day school, Sunday school?

f. How involved were you or your former spouse with the school -- e.g., conferences, assemblies, PTA, helping with school work?

g. How did your child(ren) feel about the school? How did they perform there?

h. What other involvement did you have with the Jewish community -- e.g., political, social, cultural, charitable activities?

i. What was the extent of the agreement or disagreement between you and your former spouse over matters of religious observance and community participation?

j. Please describe the factors that led to your divorce. Was there a religious factor?

3. At the time of your separation or divorce:

   a. Did you encounter problems or difficulties in any of the following areas and, if so, how were they resolved?

      -- finances

      -- child custody

      -- visitation rights

      -- the get

   b. Did you seek help, advice, or support from any person(s) or institution(s)?

      -- friends and relatives

      -- a helping professional (psychologist, psychiatrist, marriage counselor, social worker)

      -- a rabbi (If not, why not? If yes, was the rabbi helpful? Could he have been more helpful?)

      -- any other institutions in the Jewish community (If yes, which ones? How did you hear about them? How helpful were they?)

      -- any group, organization, or agency in the general community

4. Now, about the present. Since your divorce, have there been changes in any of the following areas? Where there has been a

change, please indicate its nature and cause and your feelings about it.

a. Synagogue or temple affiliation

b. Your own attendance at religious services

c. Your child(ren)'s attendance at religious services

d. Your own and your child(ren)'s participation in synagogue or temple activities.

e. Your child(ren)'s religious school attendance.

f. Your child(ren)'s attitude, behavior, or performance at religious school.

g. Your own or your former spouse's involvement in the affairs of the religious school.

h. Religious observance in your own or your former spouse's home.

i. Relations with your own or your former spouse's extended family.

j. Your child(ren)'s feelings about God and Judaism.

5. Being a single parent (or a child of divorce) in the Jewish community can sometimes be difficult. Have you or your child(ren) had any negative experiences that illuminate the special problems of the single-parent family within the Jewish community?

a. What was the situation?

b. How did it arise?

c. Who was involved?

d. How did the various parties react?

e. What did you do?

f. How did you feel about it?

g. Could this kind of experience befall any single-parent family?

h. How might it have been avoided?

i. Do you think that experiences such as these should be handled

on a case-by-case basis or that community programs or mechanisms should be set up to deal with them?

6. Have you or your child(ren) had any positive experiences in relation to the Jewish community? Please describe in detail.

7. Do you now, or did you in the past, participate in any kind of single-parent group?

   a. If so, what sort of group? How did you hear about it? What were its activities? Did you find it helpful?

   b. If not, why not?

8. Have you celebrated a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah since your separation or divorce? If so, please describe the event. If one or more of your children is between nine and 12, what plans (if any) are you making for a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah?

9. Have you any suggestions or advice to offer to other single-parent families regarding their relations with the Jewish community?

10. May we contact your former spouse?