

May 2013

# Nonresidential Parenting: Parental Roles and Parent/child Relationships

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NONRESIDENTIAL PARENTING: PARENTAL ROLES AND PARENT/CHILD  
RELATIONSHIPS

BY

FALON KARTCH

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Communication

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2013

ABSTRACT

NONRESIDENTIAL PARENTING: PARENTAL ROLES AND PARENT/CHILD  
RELATIONSHIPS

by

Falon Kartch

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013

Under the Supervision of Professor Lindsay Timmerman

Nonresidential parents are defined as parents who do not live with one or more of their biological children all or most of the time. Using symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework, this study considers nonresidential parenting from a communication perspective. 40 nonresidential parents (20 mothers and 20 fathers) were interviewed in order to explore how nonresidential parents conceptualize their parent roles, how these parents report enacting their parenting, and the communication challenges they experience within their relationships with their children. Inductive analysis resulted in the identification of eight nonresidential parent roles (*limited role, active participant, nurturer, provider – tangible, teacher, sole parent, co-parent, and disciplinarian*), 11 parenting behaviors (*school involvement, spending time together, keeping in touch, assurances, providing – tangible, showing physical affection, supporting – emotional, disciplining, teaching, physical well-being – involvement, and co-parenting*), and four main communication challenges (*the residential parent, difficult topics, the children's refusal to communicate, and limits of mediated communication*). These results are described within the context of the pre-existing literature on nonresidential parenting and connections between categories and research questions are presented.

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To my participants, thank you for sharing your stories

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people that have supported me during this process. First and foremost, I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. Lindsay Timmerman. Lindsay... thank you for taking this journey with me, for always knowing when I needed a hug, for reading countless drafts and countless manuscripts, and all the late-night supportive text messages that always came right when I needed them. I cannot imagine going through this process without you. You are one of the most supportive and empathetic people that I know.

Thank you for the commitment, kindness, and understanding you have shown me. We did it!

I would also like to thank the other members of my committee: Dr. Kathryn Dinida, Dr. Erik Timmerman, Dr. John Jordan, and Dr. Sarah Halpern-Meekin. I am eternally grateful to all of you for your feedback, insights, and support during this process. Thank you for challenging me.

I would not be where I am today if it was not for the mentoring that I have received throughout my college career and I would be remiss if I did not mention those individuals here. Dr. Rich Holt for being my first qualitative methods professor and the first person to tell me that I had a gift for research. Dr. Kathleen Valde for her ongoing support and inspiration. Dr. Betty La France for her advice, kindness, and friendship. Dr. Janice Hamlet for being my very first Communication professor: your Communication Theory class changed my life. Dr. Kerry Ferris for fostering my passion for qualitative methods and Dr. Bill Cassidy for teaching me how to write a mean literature review. Thank you all.

I would also like to thank Jennifer Jackl for being my independent coder for this project. Jen, thank you for your hard-work, patience, and willingness to devote your time to assisting me with this project.

I am eternally grateful to all the nonresidential parents who took the time to speak with me during data collection for this project and for their willingness to share their stories and to all my friends, family, and mentors that assisted with participant recruitment.

Thank you. I could not have done this without you!

To my best friend Emily McWorthy, who knows how to talk me out of an anxiety attack better than practically anyone, who understands my insecurities and celebrates my accomplishments. Thank you for your support, your friendship, and for reminding me that there was more to life than just graduate school. Thanks for helping me keep balance and sanity.

I would also like to thank my friend, Dr. Lara Stache, for her ongoing support and friendship not only during this dissertation process, but also for the last four years. Lara, thank you for always listening to me, believing in me, and providing a shoulder to lean on... even when you were dissertating yourself!

To my parents Edward and Gina Schukei. Mom, thank you for all your sacrifices without which I never would not be where I am today, for your dedication to my education, and for being the kind of mother that was always in my corner. Ed, thank you for being the biggest inspiration to my scholarship by showing me that “family” is more than just biology, that not all emotions need to be stated in order to be understood, and that within the smallest gesture can be the greatest joys.

To my other set of parents, Jim and Diane Adolphson... thank you for accepting me as your own, for always being there for me, and for your unconditional love and support. I am blessed to have you as in-laws.

Finally (but most importantly), to my husband Jeremy Adolphson... nothing that I say here could even begin to capture how much you mean to me and how much you have contributed to this process. I would not be where I am today if it was not for your unwavering belief that I could accomplish this. Thank you for all the times you reassured me, talked me through panic attacks, ate copious amounts of Chinese food and frozen yogurt with me because it was the only thing that would make me feel better in the moment, and most importantly for believing in me when I could not believe in myself. You inspire me, challenge me, and understand me. You are my family.

## Chapter 1: Review of Literature

Nonresidential parents are defined as parents who do not live with one or more of their biological children all or most of the time (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006; Herrerias, 1995). Individuals may become nonresidential parents a number of ways. While some parents become nonresidential after a divorce or after their cohabitating relationship ends, other parents have always been nonresidential because their children were born outside of a marital relationship. For the purposes of the present investigation, data was only collected from post-divorce, nonresidential parents as these parents must redefine and modify their parental roles post-divorce. Nonresidential parents may or may not have custodial rights (Braithwaite & Baxter). Even in joint custody situations, it is common for one parent to have primary physical placement, meaning the child resides predominantly with that parent, making that parent the residential parent. In these situations, the other parent becomes nonresidential by default (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

While it used to be tradition that women received custody of their children following divorce (Luepnitz, 1982), that trend has been changing since the 1980s (Greif, 1987). Both mothers and fathers can become nonresidential parents. In 2009, 82% of nonresidential parents were nonresidential fathers, while the other 18% were nonresidential mothers (U.S. Census, 2011). This project will explore the relationship between divorced, nonresidential parents (both fathers and mothers) and their children. More specifically, this investigation will examine how post-divorce, nonresidential parents conceptualize their parental roles, the ways in which nonresidential parents enact parenting, and the communication challenges (i.e., barriers these parents face when

attempting to communicate) nonresidential parents experience within their relationships with their children.

Previous research on nonresidential parenting has focused on patterns of contact and visitation (Braver et al., 1993; Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, & Dornbusch, 1993; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988; Stewart, 1999a; Wolchik, Fenaughty, & Braver, 1996), child support (Braver et al.; Natalier & Hewitt, 2010), child adjustment (Falci, 2006; Gunnoe & Hetherington, 2004), father involvement (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010; Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Tach, Mincy, & Edin, 2010; Wolchik, Sandler, Sheets, Fogas, & Bay, 1993), levels of coparenting (Carlson & Högnäs, 2011; Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008), incarceration and absenteeism (Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, & Mincy; 2012), paternal engagement (Zhang & Fuller, 2012) and nonresidential parent adjustment (Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2005; Arditti & Madden-Derdich, 1993; Kielty, 2008). Researchers have also explicitly explored nonresidential parents within the context of “fragile families” (i.e., families created through nonmarital childbirth) (Carlson & McLanahan, 2009; Geller et al., 2012; McLanahan & Beck, 2010; Tach, Mincy, & Edin, 2010; Carlson & Högnäs, 2011; Zhang & Fuller; 2012). These various lines of inquiry have been framed in sociology, psychology, and family sciences/therapy. Extant research has been dominated by a “quantity approach” to understanding nonresidential parenthood, meaning the focus has been on the number of times the nonresidential parent has been in contact with their child within the last 12 months, or how often the nonresidential parent was late with child support payments. While this research provides important glimpses into the relationship between the nonresidential parent and their child,

it is also limited. Frequency of nonresidential parent/child contact does not provide insight into the contact itself, and it is the quality of this contact that promotes relational closeness as well as personal well-being (Nielsen, 2011). What is missing is an exploration of the communication that occurs within these relationships. The current investigation of these relationships, framed within the context of communication, will extend the literature on nonresidential parenting through an in-depth analysis of how these parents enact parenting, as well as the communication challenges they experience within their relationships with their children.

### **Rationale**

According to Galvin (2006), definitions of family and who individuals perceive as family are becoming increasingly complex issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, Simpson (1999) has described this as the age of the “unclear family” (p. 67). As family types become more diverse, in part through a continued rise in nonresidential parenting (by both fathers as well as mothers), traditional definitions of family become less applicable to lived experiences. Basing a definition of “parent” or “family” on co-residency is too simplistic to account for contemporary lived experiences. Arditti and Madden-Derdich (1993) emphasized the importance of establishing more progressive conceptualizations of “parenthood” that acknowledge and account for diversity of experiences as well as the dynamic nature of parenting as an ongoing and evolving role. In response to this call for a definition, Arditti (1995) proposed a definition of parenting “as a dynamic process that is in continual development over the life course, subject to change as parents’ circumstances, preferences, and children’s developmental needs change” (p. 285). While this definition is quite broad, Arditti does highlight an important aspect of parenting –

what it means to “parent” changes over time. Similarly, Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, and Buehler (1993) defined parent identity as “the self-meanings and cognitions attached to the status and roles of parent” and go on to say that this identity, and subsequent role enactment, is subject to constant change due to life events (p. 554). These definitions begin to unpack the complexities as well as the dynamic nature of modern parenting experiences, but more research specifically targeted at the parental identity of nonresidential parents is warranted.

Scholars should consider the role of the nonresidential parent for a number of reasons. First, there is a lack of institutionalization of the nonresidential parenting role, as social guidelines for how parents can and should enact this role effectively have not been clearly articulated (Arditti, 1995). A lack of norms associated with role enactment creates “role ambiguity” and leaves nonresidential parents with little guidance or preparation for how to function in this role (Rollie, 2006, p. 189). This role ambiguity is further complicated by the fact that these parents are unable to fully enact the traditional parental role because it is based on co-residency of the parent and the child; therefore, “they must redefine or modify the traditional parent role to better fit within the structural and social constraints of their nonresidential status” (Rollie, p. 190). The process of redefining or modifying the parental role will have a direct impact on how the nonresidential parent interacts with their child and how involved they are in their child’s life (Rollie). For example, one mother might have identified part of her parental role as putting her child to bed each night; however, after a divorce results in her becoming a nonresidential parent she is no longer able to enact parenting in this way. This mother must redefine what it means for her to be a parent given the limitations under which she is required to parent.

She might redefine her parent role as one of giving her child emotional support over the phone when she is unable to be physically present to tuck him or her into bed at night.

Evidence suggests parental role definitions can also influence the level of involvement the nonresidential parent has in their child's life because the more an individual identifies with their parental role, the more involved they will be with their child, whereas the less an individual identifies with the parental role, the less likely they will be to maintain their involvement with their child (Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1993). This social scientific analysis of the role of the nonresidential parent will provide preliminary evidence as to how these parents attempt to redefine and modify their parental roles and will explore how these role conceptualizations are manifested within their interactions with their children.

Second, research has indicated that nonresidential parents influence various members of the family unit, including children, residential, biological parents, and residential stepparents (Braver et al., 1993). This influence is manifested within child adjustment (Gunnoe & Hetherington, 2004), co-parenting experiences between nonresidential parents and residential parents and stepparents (King, 2007; Maccoby et al., 1993), as well as the financial position of residential parents who rely on nonresidential parents' child support payments (Arditti, Christensen, Dahl, & Rettig, 1990). While the nonresidential parent no longer co-resides with the other members of the family system, interdependence between members still exists. For this reason, stepfamily researchers have called for increased attention to these "outside" stepfamily members (Afifi, 2003; Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006; Braithwaite, McBride, & Schrod, 2003; Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Ganong & Coleman, 2004).



According to Braithwaite et al. (2003), the stepfamily consists of both inside and outside family members. Inside family members are those stepfamily members that live within the single household. For example, an inside stepfamily might consist of a biological parent, a stepparent, and two children. Outside family members are those individuals that are still a part of the larger stepfamily system, yet do not live under the same roof as the inside family members. These outside members exist outside the boundary of the single stepfamily household (such as nonresidential parents), yet are still part of the larger stepfamily system and thus can still impact the relationships and interactions of the “inside” stepfamily members (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006; Ganong & Coleman, 2004). How nonresidential parents define and enact their parental role has implications, not only for the nonresidential parent and their child, but also the other individuals that are involved in the family system. Research that explores the experiences and interactions of the nonresidential parent is then uniquely positioned to not only impact these parents and their children, but also stepfamilies as a whole. As a result this research is valuable not only to scholars, but also to practitioners who work directly with these families.

Third, previous research has been mixed as to whether gender of the parent or residential status of the parent has a greater impact on nonresidential parental involvement with their children. This body of research explores two competing perspectives on parenting: a gender system perspective and a microstructural perspective (Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2006). According to the gender system perspective, parental gender is the largest determinant of the nature of the nonresidential parent/child relationship (Hawkins et al.). According to this perspective, a nonresidential mother/child

relationship will be different than a nonresidential father/child relationship because these parents will enact parenting differently based on social assumptions of definitions of what is expected of a mother and a father. For example, the mother would be more prone to be more involved in her child's life due to social expectations of the motherly, maternal role. The microstructural perspective, on the other hand, claims a parent's residential status will be a stronger determinant of the nature of the nonresidential parent/child relationship (Hawkins et al.).

Some research suggests the nonresidential parent role has a greater impact on experiences and interactions than does gender of the nonresidential parent (Arditti; Stewart, 1999a; Stewart, 1999b). In an analysis of how nonresidential parents spend time with their children, Stewart (1999a) explored two competing hypotheses related to this time: that mothers would be less likely to engage in leisure-only activities due to the social conceptualization of the mother role as primary caregiver to children, or that nonresidential mothers and fathers will engage in a similar degree of leisure-only activity as a product of their nonresidential role, as a limited amount of time together (visitation) would predict a greater emphasis on recreation. Results provided support for the nonresidential role hypothesis, as nonresidential mothers were just as likely to spend visitation time engaging in leisure-only activities. While research has indicated small differences between nonresidential mothers and nonresidential fathers (e.g., nonresidential mothers are more likely to make contact with their children through telephone calls and letters; Stewart, 1999b), this supports the notion that a gender-only perspective on these parental responsibilities is too limiting and simplistic.

There is also research that supports the gender system perspective. Hawkins et al. (2006) presented a test of the gender systems perspective and the microstructural perspective through an investigation of patterns of nonresidential parent/child involvement. Results indicated gender was a stronger predictor of nonresidential parent involvement than was residency, as mothers tended to be more involved with their children and engaged in a wider range of activities with their children (Hawkins et al.). Further, results indicated that residency status also influenced nonresidential parent involvement, as residential parents were found to be more involved in their children's lives than were nonresidential parents, due to structural barriers (e.g., geographical distance and time) that nonresidential parents must negotiate (Hawkins et al.). Due to conflicting findings in the literature, scholars must consider the nonresidential role, as well as how both mothers and fathers understand this role, in order to provide a more comprehensive examination of how it influences role enactment. The present study will explore nonresidential parenting from the perspectives of both mothers and fathers in order to examine both the gender system perspective and the microstructural perspective.

Fourth, extant research on nonresidential parent/child relationships has privileged child support payments, frequency of contact, and mode of contact as indicators of the quality of these relationships (Arditti, 1995). This scholarship has provided useful and important information; however, these quantity-based studies (e.g., how often do nonresidential parents visit their children; how often are nonresidential parents late on child support payments) explain little about the actual nature or perceived quality of these parent/child relationships, nor do they provide knowledge regarding the communication between these family members. Researchers have called for more scholarly attention to

the quality of parent/child relationships in general (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000) and nonresidential parent/child relationships specifically (Arditti; Stewart, 1999b). For example, Arditti argues that to understand nonresidential parenting, scholars need to explore parental role transitions and the influence they have on how these parents relate to and enact parenting with their children. According to Arditti, this approach to scholarship should emphasize the quality of interactions between nonresidential parents and their children. Similarly, Stewart claimed that future research on nonresidential parents should explore the quality and contexts of interaction between these parents and their children.

More recent research has begun to move beyond these quantity-based studies and explore the quality of the nonresidential parent/child relationship (Amato & Dorius, 2010; Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006; Cashmore, Parkinson, & Taylor, 2008; Stewart, 2003). Most of this research has focused solely on the nonresidential father/child relationship, but these quality-based studies do represent a shift in the research that will provide a more well-rounded understanding of these parent/child relationships. What is still lacking within the literature is an explicit communication focus on these relationships.

In order to understand nonresidential parent/child relationships, scholars must explore the characteristics and content of these parent/child interactions. For example, one nonresidential father might pick his child up for visitation every other weekend. Upon getting back to his home, he might leave his child in front of the television and then sit in the other room. Alternatively, another father might pick his child up for visitation every other weekend and spend those weekends talking to his child about their interests,

helping with their homework, and cooking meals together. While these two nonresidential fathers both might have spent the same amount of time with their children (four days out of the month), it is highly likely that these two parents will have very different relationships with their children as well as different conceptualizations of their parental roles. Furthermore, identifying how (and how often) these nonresidential fathers communicate with their children when they are not physically together (e.g., through telephone calls, text messaging, email, Skype, etc.) will provide even deeper insight into the relationships they have with their children as well as evidence of how these two men enact their parental role. A social scientific study exploring nonresidential parent/child interactions that occur both face-to-face and through mediated channels will provide much needed details regarding the nonresidential parent/child relationship. Through detailed accounts of nonresidential parent/child interactions it will be possible to illustrate how these parents enact parenting. This interaction-based research will also provide details regarding the challenges to communication nonresidential parents experience within their relationships with their children.

Eicher-Catt (2004) has provided one of the only communication-based explorations of the experiences of nonresidential parents. Using an autoethnographic frame on nonresidential mothering, Eicher-Catt chronicled the difficulties experienced by a nonresidential mother when communicating with her children. Eicher-Catt described communication challenges the nonresidential mother experiences, while at the same time attempting to negotiate her motherly role. While Eicher-Catt provides a descriptive glance into the experiences of one nonresidential mother, research should expand this line

of inquiry to explore the communication challenges other nonresidential mothers and fathers experience.

Communication scholars have also explored communication within the nonresidential parent/child relationship from the perspective of college-aged children of nonresidential parents (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). Using relational dialectics theory, Braithwaite and Baxter explored dialectical tensions participants experienced when communicating with their nonresidential parent (31 nonresidential fathers; 19 nonresidential mothers). This study provided an empirical examination of communication within these interactions, but what is missing here is the perspective of the nonresidential parent. The current project provides a communication perspective on nonresidential parent/child relationships, through an in-depth exploration of parental role conceptualizations, how these role conceptualizations are enacted within parenting behavior, as well as the communicative challenges these parents experience.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Nonresidential Parenting**

Research indicates that parental experiences qualitatively differ between residential and nonresidential parents (Wilbur & Wilbur, 1988). Nonresidential parents experience a decrease in the amount of face-to-face and daily interaction they share with their children (Wilbur & Wilbur). As a result of these changes, nonresidential parents often report feeling less parental control over the lives of their children (Braver et al., 1993). The evolution of parental control after the transition from residential to nonresidential is best understood in terms of a move from primary to secondary control. Primary control is characterized by the ability to control the environment in ways that are

consistent with one's own wishes and desires, whereas secondary control involves one's ability to adjust to an environment over which they have little to no control (Braver et al., 1993). Residential parents have a high degree of primary control over their own lives and the lives of their children. Nonresidential parents, on the other hand, often times have limited, secondary control over the lives of their children and must learn to adapt to this new situation.

Due to the transition in level of control as well as the decrease in daily, face-to-face interaction with their children, relationships between nonresidential parents and their children must be renegotiated (Wilbur & Wilbur, 1988). This claim is supported by research that illustrates relationships between nonresidential parents and their children are fundamentally altered as a result of the parents' nonresidential status (Wilbur & Wilbur; Wolchik, Fenaughty, & Braver, 1996). Furthermore, nonresidential parents commonly report feelings of loss, self-doubt, and depression as they begin to feel their parental role diminishing (Arditti, 1995; Wilbur & Wilbur).

According to Wilbur and Wilbur (1988), there are ten common problems experienced by nonresidential parents. The first can be thought of as the double-edged sword of child support. Many nonresidential parents are ordered to pay child support to the residential parent. Negative sanctions may occur if the support is not paid; however, nonresidential parents are often criticized for trying to buy their way into the child's life (Wilbur & Wilbur). Second, nonresidential parents are labeled "bad parents" if they do not visit their children, but when they do take advantage of visitation with their children they are accused of being "bad influences" for allowing their children to break rules that residential parents enforce in their own homes. These nonresidential parents are criticized

for allowing their children to go wild during visitation time, and for not enforcing the same rules set by the residential parents.

The third common problem faced by nonresidential parents is a fear of becoming unimportant and irrelevant to their children (Wilbur & Wilbur, 1988). Similarly, a fourth common problem is being criticized for a lack of involvement in their children's lives; however, these parents are not always kept informed about various aspects regarding their children (Wilbur & Wilbur), at least partially due to a lack of legal rights to information about their children's schooling (Meyer, 2006). A fifth common problem is feeling blamed for their children's adjustment problems (Wilbur & Wilbur). The sixth common problem Wilbur and Wilbur described is a wide range of difficulties related to visitation, including limited frequency, short duration, and conflict-laden interactions with the residential parent. Seventh, nonresidential parents report feeling torn between careers and familial responsibilities (Wilbur & Wilbur). Nonresidential parents, especially nonresidential mothers, often face economic hardship (Arditti, 1995; Arditti & Madden-Derdich, 1993; Christensen, Dahl, & Rettig, 1990), yet they are criticized for spending too much time and attention on work at the expense of their children (Wilbur & Wilbur).

The eighth common problem for these parents is being criticized for focusing all their attention on being fun parents who are not responsible for the day-to-day parenting responsibilities (Wilbur & Wilbur, 1988). Said another way, nonresidential parents are criticized for being "Disneyland Dads." A Disneyland Dad (conceptualized as a phrase to describe nonresidential fathers, but nonresidential mothers have also been found to fit this profile) is a nonresidential parent who emphasizes fun and recreation during visitation



(Stewart, 1999a). This focus on fun is attractive to many nonresidential parents who only get to spend a limited amount of time with their children; therefore, they want the little visitation time they have to be a good time for both themselves and their children. Nonresidential parents are forced to balance between a desire to have fun with their children and the fear of criticism for focusing too much of their parental time on recreation.

Ninth, nonresidential parents face the dilemma between accepting their nonresidential situation or attempting to change their parental role by going back to court to alter the custody agreement (Wilbur & Wilbur). Finally, the tenth problem that is common for nonresidential parents is what Wilbur and Wilbur refer to as child support as “emotional blackmail” (p. 436). In other words, some nonresidential parents are told they cannot see their children unless they pay child support, but even when they pay the support there are no guarantees they will actually be able to see their children. In these cases, nonresidential parents feel disgruntled about paying child support, not because they do not want to provide financially for the child, but because they feel it is used as a way to manipulate them economically without adequate protection of their legal rights to see their children. Taken together, these ten common problems provide insight into the nonresidential parenting experience and the struggles these parents face as a result of their nonresidential status.

As stated previously, much of the research on nonresidential parenting is quantity-based. These quantity-based studies examine the nonresidential parent/child relationship by examining child support payments and frequency of parent/child interaction. While this body of research offers valuable insights, scholars must go beyond these measures

and explore the content of these parent/child interactions, because it is through communication that relationships are formed, developed, and maintained (Duck, 1994).

Researchers have explored in more depth the visitation-related dilemmas experienced by nonresidential parents (Arditti, 1992; Arditti & Madden Derdich, 1993). Results of two separate studies, one examining visitation from the perspective of nonresidential fathers (Arditti) and the other nonresidential mothers (Arditti & Madden-Derdich) indicated the same top three visitation complaints: (a) a lack of money to spend on entertainment during visits, (b) the residential parent interferes with visitation, and (c) visits are infrequent, too short, or both.

Research also indicates other similarities between nonresidential fathers and nonresidential mothers. One area of similarity is the relationship between their residential status and their well-being (Anderson et al., 2005; Arditti, 1995; Wilbur & Wilbur, 1988). Both fathers and mothers report feelings of depression, isolation, and guilt as a result of their nonresidential parenting status (Arditti; Kielty, 2008; Stewart, 1999a). There are also similarities between how nonresidential fathers and nonresidential mothers spend time with their children (Stewart). Typically, the stereotype of the “Disneyland Dad” has been applied to nonresidential fathers who are said to be more interested in having fun during visitation while skirting any true parental responsibility. Stewart explored whether this visitation pattern is a reflection of nonresidential parent gender or the nonresidential parent role, claiming nonresidential mothers may be less likely to become “Disneyland Moms” due to social expectations of the role of “mother” as primary caregiver to their children. Results indicated a similar pattern of activities that nonresidential mothers and nonresidential fathers engaged in with their children during visitation (Stewart). Taken

together, these results indicate that certain aspects of the nonresidential parenting experience appear to be universal regardless of sex of the parent. For this reason, it is important to explore the role of the nonresidential parent; however, it is also important to examine differences between the nonresidential fathering and nonresidential mothering experiences when they manifest.

### **Nonresidential Fathers**

The vast majority of research on nonresidential parenting has examined the experiences of nonresidential fathers, either exclusively or predominantly. The most common line of inquiry regarding these fathers centers on issues of child support and frequency of nonresidential father/child contact. While much of the early research focuses specifically on how much child support these fathers are paying and how often they are late with payments, more current research has explored nonresidential fathers' perspectives on child support (Natalier & Hewitt, 2010). Natalier and Hewitt treat child support as a more than just a financial issue, but rather as a construct embedded with social meaning. Child support is not just a monthly payment, it is embedded within a discourse of gendered power and identity, as the role of provider is still closely associated with fatherhood (Natalier & Hewitt). These researchers explored why Australian nonresidential fathers resist paying child support. Results indicated fathers struggle to manage the tension between wanting to view child support as a gift for the children, while the legal and social system view it as something the residential mother and child are *entitled* to receive. This struggle results in nonresidential fathers' perception of a loss of parental control within the system to make decisions regarding how much child support is paid and how residential mothers choose to spend the support.

Research has slowly been evolving towards a more quality-based approach to understanding nonresidential parent involvement, but still lacks an explicit focus on nonresidential parent/child communication. Scholars have also explored parental involvement explicitly within the context of nonresidential fathering (Barber, 1994; Braver et al., 1993; Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Dudley, 1991). Dudley focused specifically on nonresidential fathers that have little to no contact with their children in order to examine characteristics of these fathers' circumstances that impede their ability to maintain an active presence in their nonresidential children's lives. Results indicated four main barriers that resulted in infrequent contact with children: (a) conflict with the ex-spouse and residential parent, (b) personal problems (e.g., substance abuse, job responsibilities, and giving preference to a girlfriend above the child, among others), (c) geographical distance, and (d) children growing older and wanting to spend time with friends instead of with the nonresidential father.

Braver et al. (1993) defined parental involvement as a mixture of the "payment of child support and the frequency and emotional quality of the relationship with the child" (p. 9). Including emotional quality within the definition of parental involvement provides deeper insight into what type of relationships these parents have with their children. Unfortunately, the way these researchers measured parental involvement does not reflect this definition. Involvement was measured using five frequency items (e.g., "the number of days he or she spent with the child" and "the hours of face-to-face contact between him or her and the child") and an additional measure of child support compliance (p. 14). These results should be interpreted cautiously based on this very simple measure of involvement. These researchers identified predictors of nonresidential parental

involvement using a social exchange framework in order to calculate the perceived costs and rewards of maintaining a parent/child relationship. Results indicated the strongest predictor of paternal involvement was the fathers' perceived parental control over their children's lives; the higher the level of perceived parental control, the greater their parental involvement. These results situate parental involvement as a variable that can be addressed through frequency measures. While frequency measures provide some insight into these parent/child relationships, what is known about these relationships is limited until research addresses the nature of the interpersonal communication that occurs within these relationships. The goal of the present study is to provide insight into these parent/child interactions, by exploring the interpersonal communication that occurs within these relationships. Researchers have argued that the quality of nonresidential parent/child contact is more influential to children's post-divorce adjustment and well-being (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; King & Sobolewski, 2006). The analysis of the interpersonal communication within this context will provide knowledge that can be used to assist families in maintaining higher quality parent/child interactions, which will make family relationships stronger and contribute to the children's well-being.

Barber (1994) investigated the relationship between nonresidential father involvement and child adjustment. While the communication focus of this study was limited, Barber did examine a small list of topics fathers might give advice about: work and educational plans, future family plans, and personal problems. Adolescent children were asked how frequently their nonresidential fathers communicate advice to them about these topics, and to report their overall satisfaction level with the social support they receive from their nonresidential father. Results indicated nonresidential parents

who visited their children more frequently provided more advice. Adolescents also reported being less satisfied with the support they received from nonresidential fathers when their fathers provided less advice. This study provides insight into some of the conversational topics within nonresidential father/adolescent relationships; however, more focused research on interpersonal communication within these parents and children will provide a richer description of these relationships.

Cooksey and Craig (1998) explored nonresidential father characteristics that influence their contact with their children. The parental contact measure was comprised of three dimensions: (a) how often the father has seen his child in the last 12 months, (b) how often the father talked to his child on the phone in the last 12 months, and (c) how often the father received a letter from his child in the last 12 months (Cooksey & Craig). Results indicated such variables as geographical distance between the nonresidential father and his child, the presence of residential, biological children in the father's current residence, and gender of the child influenced the amount of contact these nonresidential fathers had with their children (Cooksey & Craig). These results provide insight into some of the potential barriers to nonresidential father/child contact. The exploration of the communication challenges within these relationships will complement and extend this line of inquiry into the barriers to nonresidential parent/child contact.

Studies have provided inconsistent results with regard to the relationship between nonresidential father involvement and child well-being (Amato, 1993). A narrative review on the topic revealed three main findings within this literature: (a) some studies show a positive correlation between nonresidential father involvement and children's well-being, (b) another group of studies indicate a negative correlation between

nonresidential father involvement and children's well-being, and (c) a third group of studies indicate there is no relationship between nonresidential father involvement and children's well-being (Amato).

Due to these inconsistencies within the literature, Amato and Gilbreth (1999) conducted a meta-analysis, integrating data from 65 studies, to explore the relationship between the nonresidential father involvement and child well-being based on four dimensions: payment of child support, frequency of contact, feelings of closeness, and authoritative parenting. Payment of child support and frequency of contact are both traditional quantity dimensions, which provide limited insight into the father/child relationship. Closeness was reflected in measures exploring how close the child and father felt towards one another, respect, and liking. These variables were measured quantitatively and while they provide more insight into these relationships than the traditional quantity approaches, these studies still lack rich description of the interactions and experiences of nonresidential fathers. Authoritative parenting behaviors included "listening to children's problems, giving advice, providing explanations for rules, monitoring children's school performance, helping with homework, engaging in projects with children, and using noncoercive discipline to deal with misbehavior" (p. 561). These authoritative parenting variables also provide more insight into these father/child relationships than traditional quantity approaches; however, these behaviors represent only one facet of these relationships and do not address parent/child bonding behaviors that are not centered in authoritative parenting behaviors.

Results of this meta-analysis indicated that payment of child support on the part of the nonresidential father was positively correlated with children's well-being, as were

feelings of closeness between nonresidential fathers and children, and nonresidential fathers' authoritative parenting style (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Amato and Gilbreth also found frequency of nonresidential father-child contact was not significantly related to children's well-being. According to Amato and Gilbreth, these results indicate that what nonresidential fathers do with their children during visitation has a more significant impact on children's well-being than does the number of visits they have together. These claims provide enhanced support that research must move beyond examinations of quantity of nonresidential parent/child contact and explore the quality of these relationships, as it is the quality that is more predictive of child-related outcomes.

A newer, yet growing body of literature on nonresidential fathers has focused on the experiences of minority and low-income nonresidential fathers (Anderson et al., 2005; Coley, 2001; Coley & Morris, 2004). Anderson et al. explored predictors of depression in African-American, low-income nonresidential fathers. Results indicated resource challenges (e.g., unemployment, lack of housing, lack of economic resources to pay child support, among others), place of residency (urban or rural), and levels of available social support predicted depression within the sample. In a narrative review of literature on low-income, minority fathers, Coley highlighted three main issues regarding these fathers that have been addressed within the literature: (a) patterns of involvement with their children; (b) economic, social, and psychological characteristics that support and prohibit these men's ability to enact a father identity; and (c) the influence these fathers have on child outcomes. Coley and Morris explored discrepancies in residential mother and nonresidential father reports of the fathers' involvement with their children within this same population. Results indicated that while both parents' reports were



similar, residential mothers reported lower levels of father involvement than did the nonresidential fathers. While the bulk of literature on the nonresidential experience focuses on nonresidential fathers, it is also important to consider nonresidential mothering experiences, as these may be qualitatively different in some regards. For this reason, some research has explored the unique experiences of nonresidential mothers.

### **Nonresidential Mothers**

Thus far, scholars have investigated the experiences of nonresidential mothers using qualitative methods (Arditti & Madden-Derdich, 1993; Bemiller, 2005; Eicher-Catt, 2004; Kartch & Tenzek, 2012; Kielty, 2008; Rosenblum, 1984). In an exploratory analysis drawn from interviews with ten nonresidential mothers, Rosenblum sought to describe why some mothers voluntarily decide to relinquish custody of their children. Results of this analysis indicated that some mothers attributed their custody decision to outside factors, such as unemployment and financial constraints, which limited their ability to be good residential mothers to their children. Another reason mothers gave for relinquishing custody was relationship problems with their children. Instead of claiming they were “not good mothers,” these women described an inability *to be good mothers to these specific children* due to the lack of a relational connection. Finally, some of these mothers also discussed their inability to be good mothers to their children, due to their own mothers’ parental failures. Because they did not have a positive role model to teach them how to be good mothers, these women felt they were incapable of fulfilling a mothering role to their own children.

In another qualitative exploration, Arditti and Madden-Derdich (1993) conducted in-depth interviews with 13 nonresidential mothers with the goal of documenting their

experiences in order to develop support strategies. Results indicated the majority of these mothers did not relinquish custody of their children voluntarily; rather, custody decisions were made by the courts (Arditti & Madden-Derdich). These mothers reported feeling hopeless, oppressed, guilty, and uncomfortable as a result of their nonresidential status, and described a variety of visitation problems, including a lack of expendable income for entertainment when their children visit, short duration of visits, and infrequent face-to-face contact (Arditti & Madden-Derdich). Participants also reported a decrease in parent/child closeness since becoming nonresidential parents and blamed the change on their nonresidential status (Arditti & Madden-Derdich).

One common framework that has been used to study nonresidential mothers is narrative theory. According to narrative theory, researchers can interpret and assess experiences through the collection of narratives (Fisher, 1984). Kielty (2008) asked 20 nonresidential mothers in the United Kingdom to tell a story about how they came to be nonresidential, and to describe the transition involved in the process of becoming a nonresidential parent, and then conducted an inductive analysis of these narratives. Results indicated three salient themes within the narrative data: (a) nonresidential motherhood as taboo, (b) some mothers felt the need to justify voluntarily becoming a nonresidential mother, and (c) other mothers became nonresidential parents involuntarily.

In a follow-up study, Kartch and Tenzek (2012) used an electronic questionnaire to collect narratives from 31 nonresidential mothers across the United States. The overarching goal was to explore the communicative challenges these women face within their relationships with their children, their children's residential caregivers, and their social networks. Results indicated two salient themes within the narratives: power

struggle and social support. These mothers' narratives were rife with examples of feeling powerless to make decisions regarding their children, powerless to explain their nonresidential status to those in their social networks, and often times powerless in communicating with their children about why they are nonresidential. Participants also reported a lack of social support to assist them in coping with the challenges they experience (Kartch & Tenzek).

### **Symbolic Interactionism and Family Roles: A Theoretical Framework**

Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the ways in which the self is socially constructed through interaction (Mead, 1934). It is through interactions with other human beings that the self is constituted and continuously re-constituted over time. Within this theory, emphasis is placed on social roles and the influence those roles have on the self (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2006). While symbolic interactionism has been more widely used within the field of sociology, communication scholars may also employ this theory in order to better understand the creation, modification, and lived experience of family roles which have implications for family communication. According to Stryker (1968), social roles originate in human beings' desire to "name one another, in the sense that they recognize each other as occupants of positions, and in naming one another involve expectations with respect to one another's behavior" (p. 559). Furthermore, human beings themselves internalize the roles others assign to them and it is through this process that the self (or identity) is constituted (Stryker). In applying symbolic interactionism to families, researchers need to first consider the family as a "social group" and to understand that behaviors within the family group function to assign meaning and value to the individuals as well as the group as a whole (Leeds-Hurwitz).

Within the social world, each actor has a variety of identities from which s/he must select to personify in a given instance. For this reason, a “hierarchy of salience” is required so that the actor may choose the identity that appears to be most salient within a given situation (Stryker, 1968, p. 560). Therefore, the identity that is most salient within a given context will inform the individual’s role performance (Stryker).

Symbolic interactionism has been used by researchers as a framework for studying nonresidential fathers. Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, and Buehler (1993) developed a theory of nonresidential father involvement in their children’s lives using symbolic interactionism as a foundation. According to this theory, the most predictive characteristic of nonresidential fathers’ continued involvement with their children should be the degree to which these men identify with their role as parent. Nonresidential fathers that identify their fatherly role as salient should be more involved with their children than fathers who do not identify as strongly with their parental role. Ihinger-Tallman et al. presented preliminary evidence to support this prediction. Stone and McKenry (1998) also presented a more elaborate test of this theory in which results again indicated support for the hypothesis that men who identify their parental role as more salient to their identities were more likely to stay involved with their children. The current study seeks to extend the use of symbolic interactionism within nonresidential parenting research by taking a role approach to understanding nonresidential parenting, as well as reflecting on how nonresidential parents’ conceptualize their parental role, how these nonresidential parents enact their parenting, and the communication challenges these parents face when attempting to parent their children from a distance.

**The role of the nonresidential parent.** Parenting is an example of a family role. According to Turner and West (2006), roles are “socially constructed patterns of behavior and sets of expectations that provide us a position in our families” (p. 120). “Mother” and “father” are two primary roles within the family system. Social understandings of what it means to be a mother or father are rooted in biological, residential parenting (Arditti, 1995). A lack of institutionalization leaves nonresidential parents with little to no knowledge about how to function successfully as parents within the constraints of their nonresidential status (Arditti; Rollie, 2006) and denies them the same level of legitimacy afforded to residential parents.

Family roles have historically been conceptualized using a gendered lens (Coltrane, 1998), meaning traditional family role definitions have been largely based on one’s gender. Within the family context, men and women have been assigned complementary, but very different, functions. Conceptualizations of parenting, namely what is expected of mothers and fathers, have also been constructed based on gender and perceived gender differences in responsibilities (Coltrane).

**The role of “father.”** Scholarship has paid far less attention to the role of the father in comparison to the role of the mother; however, some scholars have described fatherhood and how this role has evolved over time (Coltrane, 1998). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, fathers were primarily responsible for the moral upbringing of their children (Coltrane). This duty was accomplished through the father’s tutoring and training. Fathers were also considered masters over the family. Men were much more visible (than they are today) within the home, as many of them farmed or worked in various other trades that allowed them to do their work from home. For these reasons, fathers during this time period were

considered more influential in children's lives than were mothers. When the economy began to change in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and men began working predominantly outside the home, spending much of their time in the public sphere, the role of the father evolved (Coltrane; Dienhart, 1998). The role of father was reconceptualized as the secondary parental figure, whose main responsibility to the family was that of financial provider (Dienhart). "Good father" became equivalent to being a successful breadwinner for the family unit (Coltrane; Gunnoe & Hetherington, 2004). This model remained prevalent until the 1970s.

In the 1970s a new fatherhood ideal was described by psychologists and by the 1980s was exemplified within popular culture representations of fathers (Coltrane, 1998; Dermott, 2008). The new ideal father was interested in spending time with his children, even though he often needed assistance from the mother to learn how to meet the demands of various parental tasks, such as how to change a diaper. Evidence suggests this new understanding of father as one of involved participant has begun to manifest within households, especially in those families where the mother also holds employment outside of the home (Dienhart, 1998). However, the traditional notion of father as provider continues to be deeply entrenched within families' beliefs regarding family roles and has influenced much social scientific literature on fatherhood (Dermott; Dienhart).

Today the father's role within the family is still based largely on his ability to provide financially for the family (Doucet, 2013; Grief, 1997). According to Doucet, the "breadwinner ideology" is still a dominant theme within social understandings of fatherhood; however, there have also been dramatic changes to how society views fatherhood (p. 306). These combine the breadwinner ideology with a strong preference

for “new father ideals that emphasize how fathers should be emotionally present for their children” (p. 306). According to Townsend (2002), fatherhood is comprised of four major roles: emotional closeness, provision, protection, and endowment. Of these four roles, provision, which refers to the father’s duty to be a provider, is commonly cited as the most important. Results of an ethnographic study on fathering indicated that many men in Townsend’s study believed one of the most important ways they can demonstrate emotional closeness to their children is through financial support. These results indicate that while fatherhood is more than breadwinning, other aspects of fatherhood, such as emotional closeness, are also tied into the primary fatherly role of provider.

This is not to say that for fathers emotional closeness always means financial provisions. According to Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2006), today men are much more likely to believe they should share in caregiving responsibilities that have been historically and traditionally allocated to the mother. Within the nuclear family structure, fathers are seen as providing secondary caregiving to children (Stewart, 1999a). This has resulted in the social acceptance of the father role as one of “limited responsibility” (Chesler, 1986).

Scholars have hypothesized that these ideals regarding the “good father” has an impact on how nonresidential fathers understand what it means for them to be involved with their children (Arditti, 1995; Gunnoe & Hetherington, 2004). The nonresidential father role has often been conceptualized within social scientific literature using this “good father” means “good provider” framework (Arditti). For this reason, the nonresidential father role has often been operationalized through child support payments. Due to the evolution of the father role that began in the 1970s and 1980s, good fathers are

also expected to visit their children (Arditti). For this reason, the nonresidential father role has also been operationalized through frequency of visitation. While these lines of inquiry do provide valuable knowledge regarding some nonresidential father behaviors, when these variables provide the dominant frame for research, scholars do not adequately capture the challenges nonresidential fathers experience in interacting with their children. This research lacks a deep understanding of the quality of nonresidential fathers' communication with their children, which is problematic when considering new father ideals that also involve emotional connection and presence.

**The role of “mother.”** Beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women became the primary parent responsible for childcare (Ryan, 1982). During this time, the woman's role was redefined as one of maternal responsibility. This responsibility was part of a larger social movement toward the “cult of domesticity” and the woman's place within the private sphere of the home (Coltrane, 1998). Motherhood was placed on a pedestal as the woman's “moral calling” (Coltrane, p. 88). These ideals transpose nicely onto the image of the 1950s housewife and mother. The 1950s version of women – that a woman should be consumed by her role of wife and mother – was most popular from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s and still continues to be idealized today (Coltrane). While research shows this 1950s mothering ideal did not reflect the lived experiences of most American families, the myth of the ideal mother continues to inform social norms and ideals regarding motherhood today (Coltrane).

According to Douglas and Michaels (2004), our society still holds onto what they call the “mommy myth” – the idea that motherhood is eternally fulfilling and rewarding for women (p. 3). This myth of motherhood is not an unfamiliar concept. According to



Oakley (1976), there are three major components to the myth of motherhood: “all women need to be mothers, all mothers need their children, and all children need their mothers” (p. 186). Norms of motherhood continue to reinforce these ideals as truisms that define what it means to be a good mother (Schur, 1984). The myth of motherhood has directly informed the creation and conceptualization of compulsory motherhood (Pogrebin, 1983). According to compulsory motherhood, a woman’s primary objective in life is to become a mother. Everything else a woman does, creates, and experiences is secondary to her experiences as a mother. Compulsory motherhood ties notions of female identity into the role of mother and the experiences of motherhood: “[a] woman’s well-being is so tied up with mothering that her identity is sometimes assumed to be tenuous and trivial without it” (Coltrane, 1998, p. 90).

While family make-up and dynamics continue to evolve and change over time, Americans persist in holding onto the myth of motherhood. According to Douglas and Michaels (2004), a “new momism” exists within our culture (p. 4). According to the new momism, no woman is truly complete until she has children, women are the best primary caretakers for children, and a good mother is one that is entirely devoted to her role as mother. Douglas and Michaels suggest that “to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7 to her children” (p. 4). In a quantitative analysis of the construction of a mother identity, Heisler and Ellis (2008) found that mothers continue to feel pressure to conform to the new momism as results indicated the most prevalent theme new mothers reported hearing about motherhood was that motherhood should not only be a woman’s first priority, but rather it should consume all other roles within her life. The new momism as well as the

culture of ideal motherhood have negative implications for all mothers (O'Reilly, 2010), yet nonresidential mothers are placed within a uniquely defunct space as mothers due to these social ideals. In order to examine nonresidential mother/child relationships, it is important to first consider the ways in which social ideals regarding mothering impact the way these mothers conceptualized their unique parental role being both “mother” and “nonresidential.”

Preliminary research has begun to explore how nonresidential mothers attempt to perform their mothering role (Bemiller, 2005; Eicher-Catt, 2004). Bemiller explored how nonresidential mothers defined and enacted mothering, as well as how they negotiated their nonresidential role, through qualitative interviews with 16 nonresidential mothers. All of these mothers were residential parents prior to becoming nonresidential, and reported engaging in intensive mothering when they were residential mothers. Intensive mothering has been described by Hayes (1996) as spending as much time with one's children as possible; buying children items they need, but also items that they want; focusing a great deal of one's energy on their children; and sacrificing one's own wants and needs for their children. Nonresidential mothers in Bemiller's sample described the role of mother through discussion of intensive mothering. In other words, these mothers believed the behaviors associated with intensive mothering are the common role responsibilities of mothers. When these mothers transitioned from residential to nonresidential, however, they reported an inability to continue parenting the way they did when they were residential. Participants claimed their role as mother had to change, even though they did not want it to, because they no longer interacted with their children face-to-face on a daily basis. These mothers reported role ambiguity as they were not sure how

to be both mothers and nonresidential. Participants enacted one of two strategies to cope with role changes. Some of these mothers ( $n = 11$ ) continued to enact intensive mothering whenever they were with their children. Bemiller referred to these mothers as “accommodators” as they attempted to accommodate traditional role conceptualizations; however, these mothers reported lower levels of adjustment to being nonresidential, higher levels of guilt, and increased prevalence of depression. The rest of these mothers ( $n = 5$ ) attempted to reconceptualize their parental role. Bemiller referred to these mothers as “resistors” as they attempted to resist dominant, cultural role definitions of mother and enact mothering in ways that fit within their new parental circumstance. While resistors appeared to have an easier time transitioning into their new parental roles, participants in both the accommodating and resisting groups described not really feeling like parents anymore. Due to role changes, these mothers wrestled with wanting to be mothers, but feeling as though they really are no longer fulfilling that role.

Through an auto-ethnography, Eicher-Catt (2004) explored the link between role conceptualization and the perceived quality of parent/child relationships within the nonresidential context. Eicher-Catt conceptualized nonresidential mothering as a performance, suggesting motherhood is a role that one must continuously perform for others, including one’s children, ex-spouse, and social network. Through this performance framework, Eicher-Catt discussed her own desire to perform motherhood competently and how her performance was constantly challenged due to her nonresidential status, a lack of shared space with her children, and visitation restrictions. Eicher-Catt described the process of departure (the nonresidential mother saying good-bye to her children at the end of visitation) and reunification (when a mother is reunited

with her children at the beginning of a visitation session) as particularly difficult interactions to engage in while simultaneously performing motherhood due to the awkward and atypical context in which these processes occur. According to Eicher-Catt, her role as mother is in “constant jeopardy” as she always feels as if she is struggling for legitimacy as a “parent” (p. 85). In order to overcome these barriers and perform motherhood competently, Eicher-Catt works to define and communicate intimacy with her children in new ways. For example, she and her sons have developed new rituals for greeting one another with kisses, and specific sayings they exchange during departure. Another challenge Eicher-Catt described was a dialectical tension between “visitor” and “mother.” Because nonresidential mothers occupy both of these roles at the same time and because the role of mother does not traditionally include a visitor component, Eicher-Catt constantly felt a tension between these roles that she believed kept her from performing competently as either a mother or a visitor. While these findings provide a valuable starting point for research in this area, scholars must expand their focus beyond one individual and begin collecting experiences of other nonresidential mothers as well as nonresidential fathers. The proposed study seeks to extend this line of inquiry by posing the following research questions:

RQ1: How do nonresidential parents conceptualize their role as “parents”?

RQ2: How do nonresidential parents report enacting parenting?

RQ3: What communication challenges do nonresidential parents experience within their relationships with their children?

## Chapter 2: Method

### Participants

Participants were recruited using criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). In order to participate in this study an individual had to be a divorced parent who did at one time, but currently does not, live with one or more of their biological children (i.e., be a nonresidential parent). Participants who met this criteria were recruited a number of ways. First, the researcher posted a description of the research to parenting pages on Facebook and as a status update on their own Facebook profile. Friends of the researcher were encouraged to share the call on Facebook as well. Second, the researcher posted a description of the project to Craigslist. Third, the researcher disseminated information pertaining to the project through flyers posted around the university and surrounding community. Fourth, undergraduates were offered extra credit in Communication courses if they participated in the research, or referred someone who participated in the research. All participants were offered a \$5 Target gift card for their participation. Participation was voluntary.

Forty nonresidential parents were interviewed (20 fathers, 20 mothers). See Table 1 for a list of descriptive information for each participant. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 66, with an average age of 40.35 years. Thirty-three participants self-identified as White or Caucasian, two participants as Mexican, and two participants as Asian. The remaining three participants each self-identified as American Indian, African American, and Celtic respectively. Participants were living in a wide range of regions within the United States (23 from the Midwest; six from the South; four from the Southwest; three from the West; three from the East) and one participant was currently living abroad in Mexico. The majority of participants had attended college for at least some period of time

(Master's Degree,  $n = 11$ ; Bachelor's Degree,  $n = 7$ ; some college,  $n = 9$ ); others had different post-secondary education (Associate's Degree,  $n = 4$ ; vocational training,  $n = 2$ ) and all respondents had attended high school (high school diploma,  $n = 5$ ; some high school,  $n = 2$ ). Participants were asked to identify their current occupation, and a range of occupations were represented (customer service,  $n = 8$ ; technical positions,  $n = 7$ ; business/professional positions,  $n = 7$ ; education,  $n = 6$ ; health field,  $n = 2$ ; homemaker,  $n = 2$ ; military,  $n = 1$ ). In addition, several respondents were unemployed ( $n = 5$ ), one identified as a student, and one was retired. With regard to annual income, a range of income levels was represented ( $\$0 - \$29,999$ ,  $n = 14$ ;  $\$30,000 - \$59,999$ ,  $n = 9$ ;  $\$60,000 - \$89,999$ ,  $n = 7$ ;  $\$90,000$  and up,  $n = 6$ ; four participants did not report their income level). Respondents varied in the length of time they have been a nonresidential parent, ranging from four months to 19 years, with an average length of 4.93 years.

Participants also varied in the ages of their children; however, due to the nature of the research questions participants with adult children were not recruited. Interviewing a parent with a 30-year-old child about their experiences being nonresidential might be more complex, as the parent has a relational history with that child as an adult. Questions like "how has being a nonresidential parent impacted your relationship with your child" might be confounded by events in the parent/child relationship once the child entered adulthood. Only respondents who had minor children, and/or young adult children (none older than 22-years-old) were recruited to participate in the study. In two instances, participants had multiple children with some older than the 22-year-old cut off, and some younger. In those cases, the researcher focused predominantly on these parents' relationships with their younger children. Participants' children then ranged in age from

two to 27, with an average of 13.19 years. In the case of the parent with the 27-year-old, the parent's youngest child was 20; therefore the interview focused predominantly on the 20-year-old.

While 85% of the sample had only one or two, respondents ranged in their number of nonresidential children (one,  $n = 17$ ; two,  $n = 17$ ; three,  $n = 5$ ; four,  $n = 1$ ). Twelve participants also had residential, biological children (one,  $n = 8$ ; two,  $n = 1$ ; three,  $n = 2$ ; four,  $n = 1$ ). In addition, eight respondents reported having stepchildren (one,  $n = 4$ ; two,  $n = 2$ , three,  $n = 1$ ; five,  $n = 1$ ).

### **Procedures**

Data was collected through in-depth, qualitative interviews (either face-to-face or via the telephone) with nonresidential parents. Arditti (1995) emphasized the importance of qualitative research on nonresidential parenting in order to solicit the perspectives of participants, and to understand those perspectives through nonresidential parents' own voices. Through qualitative interviews, this research provides rich description regarding how these parents conceptualize their roles and enact parenting as well as the communication challenges they face within their relationships with their children.

The interview protocol (see the Appendix for complete protocol) was divided into four main sections. The first section was comprised of basic demographic items as well as questions that explore the basic context of each nonresidential parent's unique circumstance. This section included questions regarding how many children the participant had, including sex and age for each child, and a description of how they each became a nonresidential parent. The second section was made up of items soliciting participant perspectives on parental roles, including questions about the responsibilities

of both residential and nonresidential parents. Participants were also asked to reflect on their own parental role, and how this role may have changed after they became nonresidential. The third section of the interview focused on frequency of contact between nonresidential parents and their children, as well as the communication channels used within these relationships (e.g., text messaging, Skype, Facebook, etc.).

The fourth and final section of the interview explored nonresidential parent/child interactions through a series of questions designed to facilitate discussion regarding the nonresidential parent's perceived parental control, perceived level of involvement, and communication behaviors. Participants were asked to provide detailed descriptions of the conversations they have with their children using various communication technologies as well as the types of messages they send to their children through these mediums. For example, if a nonresidential parent reported using twitter with her teenage daughter, the participant was asked to give some examples of the types of messages she tweets. Participants were also asked to list and describe any topics that are difficult to discuss with their children, why they believe these topics are difficult, how they attempt to cope with these difficult topics, and how they attempt to communicate intimacy within their relationships with their children. Participants were also asked to reflect on how these relational variables have evolved since becoming a nonresidential parent. Participants who are nonresidential parents to more than one child were asked to report on their interactions and experiences with each child.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed (using Dragon NaturallySpeaking) for further analysis. Interview length ranged from just under 20 minutes to nearly 90 minutes (19:02 to 1:27:22); the average length of the interviews was



48:18 minutes. Transcribed interview data resulted in 473 single-spaced pages of data for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Interview data was analyzed inductively (Patton, 2002), using symbolic interactionism as a general framework for understanding role conceptualization within the context of nonresidential parenting. A four step coding process, as outlined by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) was used to facilitate data analysis. First, all interview transcripts were open coded (Emerson et al.). During this stage all interview transcripts were read closely with an eye toward identifying data that reflected any of the three RQs and creating general codes within each RQ. For example, all data excerpts that reflected participants' nonresidential parent role conceptualizations were identified as related to RQ1. All data excerpts that reflected how participants actually enact their parenting were identified as related to RQ2, and all data excerpts that reflected communication challenges respondents experience within their relationships with their children were identified as related to RQ3. The general codes that were created at this stage served to begin describing categories of excerpts within each RQ. For example, for RQ1 data excerpts were coded based on general themes such as provider, limited role, and participant. For RQ2, these general codes included involvement, showing affection, and spending time together. For RQ3, these general codes included the residential parent, children's refusal to communicate, and difficult topics.

The second step of data analysis involved writing initial memos (Emerson et al.), constructed by identifying and electronically sorting all open coded data excerpts by research question and general codes. The third step of data analysis was focus coding

(Emerson et al.). During focus coding, all initial memos were read and the data was coded again. At this point, the researcher begin to refine code definitions in order to further categorize data into groupings that provide more concise answers to each research question. In order to facilitate this process, all data excerpts were written on index cards and then sorted into stacks that reflected thematic categories. The researcher then attempted to collapse categories when possible. The fourth and final stage of data analysis involved writing integrated memos (Emerson et al.). Here focus codes were electronically grouped together to explore variations (sub-themes) within the broader themes. These memos include a code (or theme) definition and description, a short discussion of each data excerpt, and a discussion of why these excerpts are important and how they related to the research questions.

The researcher then presented a colleague with the raw data (i.e., the notecards) to be independently coded. The independent coder was only given the data excerpts on notecards; they were not given any information regarding the codes the primary researcher had identified. The coder was then asked to sort the cards on their own. Once the independent coder had completed their own coding process, the author and the coder met to discuss the data. There was a high level of inter-coder agreement between the researcher and the independent coder. For RQ1, there were three data excerpts that resulted in disagreement. For these three cases, the researcher and the coder reached agreement through discussion. For RQ2, after some discussion, the researcher and the coder decided to collapse two categories. The researcher and coder both felt these changes adequately reflected the behaviors reported in the data. There were also three excerpts for RQ2 that resulted in disagreement between the researcher and the coder, but

consensus was reached after some discussion. For RQ3, there was disagreement between the researcher and the coder on one excerpt, but consensus was reached after some discussion. The researcher and the coder also decided to discard four excerpts due to mutual agreement that these items did not, in fact, relate to RQ3.

## Chapter 3: Results

### Role of the Nonresidential Parent

RQ1 asked how nonresidential parents conceptualize their role as “parents.” Participants described their parental roles 130 times within the data. Inductive analysis of these excerpts resulted in the identification of eight major nonresidential parental roles: *limited role*, *active participant*, *nurturer*, *provider – tangible*, *teacher*, *co-parent*, *sole parent*, and *disciplinarian*. See Table 2 for a complete list of these roles, along with examples of messages in each category, and message and participant *Ns* for each. Throughout the Results section, *Ns* in parentheses refer to number of messages in a category (e.g., out of 130); percentages refer to how many parents are represented in that category (i.e., out of 40). All participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

**Limited role.** When participants described their roles as parents, they most frequently described the nonresidential role as a *limited role* ( $n = 32$ ; 55%). These instances are characterized by participants’ descriptions of the limited nature of their parental role. These participants conceptualized the role of nonresidential parent as restricted and constrained. For example, Veronica is a nonresidential mother to twins who live with her ex-husband:

It is hard because I have gone several months without being a parent and then I have to put on the parental role... it’s like I have to step into that role. I am not able to be that role for very long and then I step out of it again.

This nonresidential mother characterized her parental role as limited because she is not able to enact the role of mother all the time. In her view, she can only really “mother”

when she is physically with her children and since she cannot physically be with her children all of the time, she views her role as limited. Similarly, Steven said "...you've got a father who basically becomes relegated to being the uncle that kids see once in a while." Again, Steven described his parental role much like Veronica did. He feels more like an uncle than a father, due to the limited amount of time he gets to spend with his children. When asked about his parental role, Nathan simply referred to himself as a "part-time parent." These examples all illustrate that these parents viewed their parental role as limited given the nonresidential component of their parental lives.

**Active participant.** The second most commonly described role of the nonresidential parent was *active participant* ( $n = 28$ ; 55%). This category is comprised of two sub-categories: *active participant – general* ( $n = 15$ ; 33%) and *active participant – education* ( $n = 13$ ; 23%). *Active participant – general* refers to instances where respondents described the role of the nonresidential parent as being involved with their children and participating in their children's lives. For example, Doug said the nonresidential parent should "take an active role" in their children's lives, while Mary emphasized "devoting your time" to your children. Steven said "it is just important to try to be there any way that you can." These participants all underscored the importance of continued involvement with their children.

The second sub-category within the active participant category was *active participant – education*. Here, similar to the first theme within this role, participants also emphasized the importance of continued involvement and engagement in their children's lives; however, these participants specifically stated nonresidential parents should be involved with their children's educational experiences. These participants explicitly

mentioned nonresidential parents should communicate with their children's teachers, assist their children with their homework, and make sure that their children maintain high grades. Lanie explained: "being a nonresidential parent I feel like I have to be involved with the school as much as I can... being in touch with the teachers." Damon also emphasized the importance of active participation in the child's education. He claimed an important role of the nonresidential parent was to "make sure that they are doing what they need to do in school, making sure that their grades are up and keeping up with things that way." Each example within the *active participant* theme emphasizes the importance of the nonresidential parent's continued active involvement in the child's life. These parents must work to stay involved with their children's lives and with their children's educational experiences.

**Nurturer.** The third most frequently reported role these parents discussed was *nurturer* ( $n = 20$ ; 48%). These participants described their parental role as one of loving, caring for, and providing emotional support to their children. When asked about the primary parental roles of a nonresidential parent, Jeremy replied "nurturing," Candice stated, "someone who is responsible for nurturing and caring for their children," and Phoebe replied, "just be there for them." On a similar note, Elena said: "Make sure that they [nonresidential parent] work on the relationship with the kids to let them know that there is love from both sides, and to let them know that even though they are separate, they are still important." Even though the nonresidential parent, by definition, is not able to be with their children as regularly or as often as a residential parent, these participants believed it is still important for them to communicate to their children that they are loved, supported, and cared for.

**Provider – tangible.** The fourth most frequently cited role of the nonresidential parent was *provider – tangible* ( $n = 17$ ; 38%). In these instances, participants claimed one important role of the nonresidential parent is to provide for their children. These parents described the importance of providing financial support in the way of child support, clothing, food, shelter, and health insurance. According to Mary, one of the primary parental responsibilities of the nonresidential parent is to “provide what she [daughter] needs.” Similarly, Caroline said “pay child support,” while Ryan noted “making sure they’ve got clothes and they are fed.” Both nonresidential mothers and fathers described the importance of providing financial provisions for their children and emphasized that as part of their continuing responsibilities towards their nonresidential children.

**Teacher.** The fifth most commonly described nonresidential parenting role was that of *teacher* ( $n = 14$ ; 33%). Here participants discussed the importance of teaching their children morals and values, as well as teaching them to be independent. For example, Alan, when asked about the responsibilities of a nonresidential parent, described the role of *teacher*:

Common responsibilities are trying to teach your kids how to behave well and how to be polite to others and how to... my child is only five years old, so for me that has really been kind of just trying to teach kids the basics about how to be a decent human being, and just trying to teach them how to tie their shoes or put on their jacket, and how to look both ways before crossing the street and teaching them all these things.

This nonresidential father describes the role of *teacher* as encompassing instruction regarding both morals and values (how to treat people) as well as functional tasks

(shoelace-tying). Arielle said: “my goal as a parent is to teach them to be independent,” which is similar to what Damon said: “guiding your child through life to the point where they can go through life on their own without you.” Arielle and Damon are both emphasizing the importance of teaching their children to be independent so that they grow up to be functional adults. These nonresidential parents viewed the role of teacher as a primary parental responsibility.

**Sole parent.** The sixth most frequently described nonresidential parent role was *sole parent* ( $n = 9$ ; 13%). Here participants described feeling like a single parent and having to be responsible for all facets of parenting. These nonresidential parents described this as a parental role change. Before the divorce they were parenting with their spouse. After the divorce their parental responsibilities increased because there were things that their spouse had been doing in terms of parenting that now they must do on their own. For example, Richard said:

One of the things that is different [post-divorce] and becoming more and more important is establishing relationships with parents in the school. While we [ex-wife] were still living together, it was much easier to just rely on my ex to be there and be the person that got to know other moms. Now it is incumbent upon me to initiate relations and his [son’s] social life so that there are relationships established and he can meet with others socially.

This father’s parental role has shifted after the divorce, and has grown, as now he has to also engage in parental activities that were once his ex-wife’s responsibility. Xander also described feeling additional parental responsibility post-divorce:



Now I get to experience what it's like to be a single parent... I went from my ex-wife doing most of the cooking and feeding the kids, giving them baths and all that stuff to where now I do all of that.

Again, this nonresidential father describes his parental role as that of a single parent; now he is responsible for the full range of parental responsibilities because he is parenting without a second parent.

Nonresidential mothers also described *sole parent* when discussing their parental role. Emily said: "I am more responsible honestly because I am more of a single parent." This mother, similar to the nonresidential fathers discussed above, also conceptualized her parental role as being a sole parent. These parents feel more responsibility towards their children because they conceptualize their role as that of *sole parent* instead of as *co-parent* like other participants did.

**Co-parent.** *Co-parent* ( $n = 8$ ; 20%) was the seventh most frequently described nonresidential parent role. According to Bray and Kelly (1998), co-parenting relationships are characterized by "a cooperative post-divorce relationship and a mutual commitment to working together" (p. 232). Participants described working together with the residential parent as part of the way they conceptualize the nonresidential parent role, by supporting the position of the residential parent and communicating with the residential parent about the children. For example, Leah said:

Our responsibilities should be to be communicative as if we are, I don't want to say still together, but as if we are still parenting together... there still has to be that communication... so I should be responsible for communicating with him when necessary and vice versa.

This nonresidential mother sees it as her job to communicate and parent with her ex-husband, who is the residential parent to her two children. Furthermore, she sees co-parenting as part of the residential parental role; both she and her ex-husband should be communicating with one another and parenting their children together.

Phoebe also described her co-parenting role. When asked to describe the primary parental responsibilities of the nonresidential parent she said:

For me it is sometimes to figure out if he is crabby. When he is [crabby] with his dad to sit down and talk to him and ask him why he is crabby, and just to figure it out and then once I do figure it out, talk to my ex-husband [residential parent] and tell him what is going on so he has an idea. It's more now of being eyes and ears.

This nonresidential mother conceptualizes her parental role as “being eyes and ears” for the residential parent by identifying issues with her son and communicating those issues to the residential parent. Phoebe conceptualizes her parental role as being part of a parenting team, where she shares information about her son with her ex-husband so they can more effectively parent.

It was not only nonresidential mothers who described this co-parenting role. Dean also described co-parenting as one of the primary responsibilities of the nonresidential parent. According to Dean, you “know that you may not agree with the other parent all the time, but you're going to support the other parent's position because he or she is the residential parent.” Dean described a willingness to support the residential parent, even if he does not agree with them, because they are the residential parent. Like Phoebe, Dean also views his parental role as being part of a team with his ex, so much so that he is willing to support her position even when he does not fully agree with her, in order to

present a united parental front to his child. These participants all emphasized communicating with and supporting the residential parent as a primary parental role.

**Disciplinarian.** Finally, the eighth most commonly described nonresidential parent role was that of *disciplinarian* ( $n = 2$ ; 5%). Only two participants, both fathers, conceptualized *disciplinarian* as part of their nonresidential parenting role. These nonresidential fathers described being responsible for punishments and rule setting. When asked about his parental role, Phil said “deal out punishment.” Blaine emphasized rule setting as an important parental role: “‘here are the rules and my way of thinking,’ so there is that aspect of being a parent.” While the role of *disciplinarian* was not commonly reported within this sample, it is important to note that two fathers included this in their conceptualization of their parental role.

### **Enacting Parenting as a Nonresidential Parent**

RQ2 asked how nonresidential parents report enacting parenting. Participants described methods they employ to enact parenting 176 times within the data. Inductive analysis of these excerpts resulted in the identification of 11 methods nonresidential parents employ to enact parenting: *school involvement*, *spending time together*, *keeping in touch*, *providing – tangible, assurances*, *showing physical affection*, *supporting – emotional*, *disciplining*, *teaching*, *involvement – physical well-being*, and *co-parenting*. See Table 3 for a complete list of these strategies for enacting parenting, including examples of these messages, and message and participant *Ns* for each.

**School involvement.** The most commonly reported method these nonresidential parents used to enact parenting was *school involvement* ( $n = 37$ ; 78%). This category is divided into two sub-categories: *school involvement – general* ( $n = 24$ ; 53%) and *extra-*

*curricular involvement* ( $n = 13$ ; 25%). *School involvement – general* consists of helping children with their homework, talking to children about their school work, and communicating with teachers. For example, Malcolm discussed talking about and assisting his children with their schoolwork. The only “visitation” this father has with his two daughters is weekly, one-hour Skype conversations. When asked what topics he discusses with his children during these “visits,” Malcolm said:

Sometimes they will bring up a report, a research project they’re working on in class and we will talk about that. I’ll take anything they bring up and I can delve into, and I can work it as long as I can, and the mentoring with the ideas and brainstorming and problem-solving, things to think about as they do their research topics.

This father attempts to assist his daughters with their homework during his Skype conversations and emphasized his effort to talk about these school topics for as long as he can in order to provide some mentoring to his daughters. Malcolm’s ability to enact his parenting is inherently limited by the parameters of his visitation; therefore, his participation in his daughters’ schoolwork is an important means for him to participate in their lives. He is not able to attend their school functions or spend time with them, so these mentoring conversations represent his primary means of being active in the lives of his daughters. Emily also described enacting parenting through assisting her son with homework. According to this mother, “we do homework every night when he is here. I spend lots of time [on homework].” An important part of *school involvement – general* for these parents was to provide their children with assistance with their school work.

Participants also described communicating with teachers as another means of staying involved in their children's school lives. Lanie said: "I try to email with the teachers at school. That way I know where they're at as far as grades and if they're not understanding something." Similarly, Phoebe said: "I will contact his teachers and find out what can be done on my end of it." These examples illustrate that besides asking their children about school, and assisting them with homework, another means by which these parents were able to participate in their children's education was by communicating directly with their teachers. This provides an additional avenue for nonresidential parents to maintain their involvement and gives them another source of information related to how their children are doing in school.

The second sub-category within *school involvement* is *extra-curricular involvement*. Here participants emphasized being involved with and attending their children's extra-curricular functions including sporting events, award ceremonies, and speech tournaments. Candice said, in reference to extra-curricular activities, "I go as much as I can." Kristen, a mother whose son lives primarily with his father in another city, emphasized how important it is to attend her son's sporting events:

If it is a Saturday, and it's not my Saturday I go and see my son's basketball game. If it is 110 miles to see my child for an hour, for him to know that I'm there, I will do it.

*Extra-curricular involvement* was an important means of enacting parenting for Kristen. She felt strongly that she needs to attend her son's sporting events to communicate to him that she is involved in his life and supports him in his activities. She does not mind traveling to attend these events, because she believes they are important, and therefore

worth the travel. Samuel, a nonresidential father with a job that required a great deal of out-of-town traveling said: “sometimes she’d tell me when something was going on, like a basketball game, and then I’d try to make it.” One important means for these parents to enact parenting was to maintain involvement with their children’s school work and extra-curricular activities.

**Spending time together.** The second most frequently cited method for these nonresidential parents to enact parenting was *spending time together* ( $n = 28$ ; 70%). These parents described engaging in a variety of activities when they have face-to-face visitation time with their children. Participants emphasized wanting to spend visitation time doing things with their children and creating memories. Logan described the differences between being a residential parent (when he was still married to his ex-wife) and being a nonresidential parent:

When I lived there, it was like I lived there and I was tired from work. I was tired and I just sat on the couch. Got used to the routine, and now the difference between now when I do get him, I try be as active with him as possible. So whatever short time I have – I get him every other weekend which is great. It is nice to have breakfast, lunch, dinner and hang out with him and watch movies. Go places, I go places every weekend, I take him and do at least one big event. I want to keep with that.

The way Logan enacts parenting is different now than when he was a residential father. When he was a residential father, he was not spending as much quality time engaging in joint activities with his son. Now that his time with his son is limited, he attempts to be more active with him. This illustrates one way that Logan’s parenting behaviors have

changed now that he is a nonresidential father. He values time with his son more and attempts to make that most of this time. Logan provided a list of typical activities he does with his son on the weekends, including going to museums and playing in the park.

Blaine, who lives in a different state than his two children, emphasized being active during his visits:

It is not like they are coming over to my house and just playing video games because we're staying in a hotel room. We are actively doing stuff together the whole time I'm there and it really is quality time.

This father flies in to visit his children every six weeks. During these weekend visits he spends this time engaging in a variety of activities with them and reported feeling satisfied that this time really was *quality* time.

Elena also emphasized enacting parenting through spending time with her children: "we were doing projects together, sewing, we would hang out. I always tried to make it so they were doing things together when they were with me." Each of these parents discussed enacting parenting during face-to-face visits by focusing on spending time together with their children and using that time to engage in activities together.

**Keeping in touch.** The third most common method these nonresidential parents employed to enact parenting was *keeping in touch* ( $n = 23$ ; 40%). While many of these parents emphasized spending time with their children, this time is inherently limited due to the nonresidential component of these relationships; therefore, *keeping in touch* was described as another important means to enact their parenting. *Keeping in touch* refers to nonresidential parents' attempts to stay connected with their children through frequent telephone calls, emails, letters, and video messages. For example, Terrance said: "I make

sure that I talk to them every day on the phone.” Similarly, Candice said “I call every 48 hours,” and went on to describe the content of those telephone conversations:

I ask them how was their day, what has been happening at school, how are they feeling and I usually give them a rundown of what my day was like and what their little sister’s [a residential child] day was like and if any of us are sick and if anything has went on since I saw them last.

These frequent telephone conversations function as a way for these nonresidential parents to maintain a parental presence in their children’s lives and provide a means for these parents to stay connected with their children’s daily lives as best they can. Candice uses these calls as a primary means for trying to stay current on what is happening with her children. She is not present every day to see and experience the daily lives of her children, so she engages in *keeping in touch* behaviors as a way to get that information. For these participants, these telephone calls are used to re-affirm to their children that they are still engaged, interested, and participating in their lives.

Other participants were not always able to use the telephone, but used other communication technologies to stay connected with their children. For example, Xander is currently in the military. His occupation requires travel and when he is traveling on a ship he is not able to use the telephone to connect with his two young daughters.

According to this nonresidential father:

when my ship was underway I cannot call them, so I will normally send an email to my ex-wife [the residential parent] who I believe communicates to them, and in most cases I get a response like [daughter] says this, and [other daughter] says that.



Here Xander relies on the residential mother to communicate his messages to his children, but when he is on ship he does not have many options for communicating with his daughters, and he reported feeling confident that his ex-wife does in fact communicate his messages to his daughters. In this situation, Xander has to be creative in order to *keep in touch* with his children due to his occupation, but modern technology affords him additional avenues from which to *keep in touch* with his daughters. Due to the nonresidential component of these parent/child relationships, *keeping in touch*, through telephone calls, emails, or other mediums is an important means available to these participants to enact parenting.

**Assurances.** The fourth method nonresidential parents used to enact parenting was through *assurances* ( $n = 19$ ; 38%). According to Stafford and Canary (1991), assurances refer to statements that imply a relational future. Canary, Stafford, Hause, and Wallace (1993) described assurances as “overtly assuring each other of the importance of the relationship” (p. 9). Behaviors and messages were coded into this category if they explicitly reaffirmed the nonresidential parents’ dedication and devotion to their children. These messages emphasized that the nonresidential parents are thinking about their children, love their children, and miss their children, which functions to assure their children that even though their parent cannot always be physically present they are still a family and their nonresidential parent still values their parent/child relationship. For example, Lanie said:

I try to make sure I tell them frequently that they are loved and that they are cared for. That is something I’m a little bit more aware of now that I’m not there and I can’t show them physical attention.

Because Lanie is not physically present now that she is nonresidential, she emphasizes to her children that she loves them as a way to assure them she still cares for them. She even stresses here the added importance of *assurances* because she is not physically present to show her children physical affection. For Lanie, *assurances* serve as a means of verbally communicating affection to her children when she is unable to do so nonverbally.

Similarly, Phoebe described using Facebook as a means of communicating assurances to her son: “on Facebook I tell him I love him, and I will see him on whatever day that I am supposed to get him, or do like in Facebook they have the smiley faces or the smooch face.” This mother uses this social networking website and emoticons as means of communicating assurances to her son, which illustrates how nonresidential parents employ technology to enact parenting, since their face-to-face time with their children is limited. By communicating that she loves him and reiterating the next time she is going to see her son, this mother is reaffirming her commitment to him.

Other nonresidential parents included messages of praise within their assurances. For example, when describing his conversations with his daughter on the phone, Alan said:

Lately I have been trying to say that I’m really proud of her for trying to be a good girl at school or just being a good girl in general, just because I want her to know that I’m really proud of her. Just that kind of stuff. “I love you.”

This nonresidential father communicates assurances through telephone calls with messages such as “I love you” and “I am proud of you.” Xander described similar telephone conversations that he has with his children. When asked how he communicated closeness or affection with his children, this nonresidential father replied:

As far as verbally I am very expressive and tell them that I'm proud of them often, and so, on the phone I am obviously limited to just verbal affection. So I just reinforce that I love them, that I'm proud of them.

For these nonresidential parents, messages that reaffirm they are proud of their children function as assurances, because they communicate to their children that their nonresidential parents value them and their relationships with them.

**Providing – tangible.** The fifth most common method these nonresidential parents described for enacting parenting was *providing – tangible* ( $n = 18$ ; 33%). The *providing – tangible* category is comprised of all examples participants provided of enacting parenting based on providing financial support for the child. In some cases, this was achieved through child support payments. In other instances, participants described providing their children with other necessary items like clothing, food, and health insurance. When describing parenting, Caroline said, “I pay child support.” Damon also mentioned his child support payments, but also described his willingness to provide financially for his children outside of just the support payments:

When it comes to shoes, because my kids have gone through shoes like they are – almost like it's toilet paper – it's almost like every other month they are getting a new pair of shoes because they just will go through them so fast. So one time she [residential mother] will buy them and the next time I buy them and we go back and forth like that. I will take my kids shopping for clothes all the time. Those things are never an issue. She does get child support from me, but that is court mandated so that does go that way. But it is never an issue, if I have to give more

money to make sure that my kids are being fed or well clothed and they have stuff for school, that is never an issue.

For this nonresidential father financially providing for his children is an important means for enacting his parenting, so much so that providing outside of what is court mandated is referred to as “never an issue.” Leah also described buying her children items that they need: “I would take them shopping and we would buy clothes or shoes or whatever.”

Jeremy described paying child support and also providing his children with extra money and items:

Well if mom [residential parent] is having a tough time putting enough food on the table, then I can send it with them or vice-versa, things of that nature. I was helping financially, handing cash around even besides the child support that was initially issued, but I stopped doing that because I know the money wasn't going for the children. So now when they are allowed treats for their snack time at school and what not, I load their back-packs with treats so they can put them in their locker and have them for a week long.

This nonresidential father described a variety of ways that he provides financially for his children including, but not limited to, formalized child support payments.

Other participants were not court ordered to pay child support, yet still chose to provide financially for their children. For example, Jared said: “I don't formally [pay child support]. I just do monthly; I send a check to them directly. I do not go through the courts or anything.” While this nonresidential father is not required to send money to his children, he chooses to do so as a way to enact parenting. He does not need to be told he has to provide for his children, rather he just decided to engage in this behavior because it

is important to him and his parental identity. While some participants were paying formalized child support and others were not, providing for their children was a common means these parents employed to enact their parenting.

**Showing physical affection.** The sixth method these nonresidential parents employ to enact parenting is *showing physical affection* ( $n = 15$ ; 35%). Participants emphasized showing affection towards their children through physical touch through the use of hugs, kisses, and cuddling. Nonresidential parents reported engaging in these behaviors when they had face-to-face time with their children in order to communicate closeness and affection with them. While reflecting on how he communicates closeness with his son now, in comparison to the affection he showed before he was divorced and became a nonresidential parent, Logan said: “I think I do it [show physical affection] more than I used to. When I have him, it is like I have to make up for some lost time.” Because this father only has visitation with his son every other weekend, he places more emphasis on showing physical affection than he once did. This illustrates another means by which Logan’s parenting behaviors have evolved since his transition to nonresidential parenting. Leah described physical affection in a similar manner: “I always make a big deal out of it [physical affection] when I see him. I squeeze him. It almost makes me cry every time I squeeze him because I miss him.” *Showing physical affection* is important to Leah as a method of enacting her parenting, but it is also emotional for her because of her desire to see her son more.

For these parents, showing physical affection towards their children is special because they are not able to do it as frequently as they would if they were residential; therefore, these displays illustrate one way of enacting parenting that is limited yet

extremely meaningful when it does occur. Alan also described showing his daughter physical affection during his visitation time. When asked how he communicates closeness with his daughter, he said: “hugging and snuggling on the couch to watch a movie or something. I always kiss her goodbye.” While these parents’ ability to show their children physical affection is restricted to the time they spend together face-to-face, these parents still emphasized these nonverbal behaviors as one way they parent.

**Supporting – emotional.** The seventh parenting behavior participants described engaging in is *supporting – emotional* ( $n = 12$ ; 25%). Here participants emphasized making themselves available as a source of emotional support for their children. When talking about supporting their children, some nonresidential parents specifically described technology as the vehicle for which they are able to provide support since they are not always able to be there face-to-face. For example, Stana described calling her son on the telephone frequently “to feel out if there is anything really troubling going on that he really needs to get support over.” While this participant is checking in with her son, she is doing so for a particular reason – to provide emotional support if needed. She highlighted one of the main ways that she parents her son is by being available to him as a source of emotional support if he should need it. Meg lives in the United States while her daughter is currently living abroad with her father. This mother finds it difficult to provide her daughter with emotional support during Skype conversations because the residential father tends to monitor their Skype interactions; however, Meg has begun using other technologies so that she can still provide her daughter with the emotional support she needs. According to Meg,

I avoid talking about it [issues the daughter has] on Skype, but instead when I sense something I just email her or text, because then she can text me back and I think it is easier for her to voice her opinion or say whatever she feels like.

Meg has to be more creative with the ways in which she communicates support to her daughter, but she is able to integrate multiple technologies so that she is still able to be a source of support.

Other participants described providing emotional support to their children, but did not specify that they engage in this through technology. For example, when asked how he communicates closeness with his children, Doug discussed conversations he has with his three children about their feelings: “we talk a lot about feelings. We talk about, it is okay how they feel.” This father communicates closeness with his children by talking about their feelings with them and creating a space where his children feel comfortable sharing their feelings with him. While participants went about communicating support to their children in a variety of different ways, what is common throughout each of these examples is that these parents are enacting parenting through emotional support provision. Even when they cannot be physically present with their children, they can still be there to support them when needed and often make extra effort to illustrate to their children that they are still there for them.

**Disciplining.** The eighth most common method these nonresidential parents described for enacting parenting is *disciplining* ( $n = 7$ ; 18%). *Disciplining* refers to instances where nonresidential parents described setting and enforcing rules for their children, as well as engaging in conversations about their children’s negative behaviors. For example, Jeremy described conversations that he has with his children about house

rules: “I say, ‘I have to lay some ground rules and they have to be followed.’” This participant enacts parenting within his home by setting the ground rules that his children are expected to respect. Cordelia provided an example of a time when she enforced one of her rules with her teenage son:

Until he called his father everything [videogames, television, etc.] got shut off, until he calls him, and he would ask me, “what would you say to him?” and I was like “honey, I do not know about your circumstances but I know the last thing you want is to not have any contact with your dad,” and I enforced that.

This nonresidential mother was adamant about her rule that when her son was visiting her home, he still had to call his residential father on a regular basis and she enforced this rule by controlling his use of technology until the phone call was made. Her son often needed to be pushed to make the phone call because he did not get along well with his father, but this nonresidential mother felt it was important for him to maintain contact with him.

**Teaching.** The ninth method nonresidential parents described as ways they enact parenting was *teaching* ( $n = 6$ ; 15%). *Teaching* refers to instances where nonresidential parents described the act of teaching their children how to do something. For example, Damon described *teaching* his children to do chores so that when they are out on their own they will know how to do these necessary tasks. According to this nonresidential father, he spends the weekend with them:

...getting them into the routine of really teaching them and preparing them for, they are going to be going to college, my son within the next four or five years, and he is going to have to learn how to do things like do the laundry and make



sure he knows how to do dishes and cook, things like that. So we [he and his wife] try to make sure that that is built into the weekend.

While Damon only sees his children every other weekend, he spends some of that face-to-face time teaching them skills they will need to function in their adult lives.

Considering the limited amount of visitation time Damon has with his children, it is interesting how much emphasis he places on *teaching* these behaviors during this time.

This illustrates the high level of importance Damon places on this parenting behavior.

Taking a different perspective, Dean discussed his approach to parenting:

I am more of an open teacher. With him I do not hide him from things, like if there is a movie on that I think is too violent, I will tell him how it's just a movie and explain things more. I am not going to shelter him.

This father is not teaching his child in the same way that Damon is, who is teaching his children how to do chores, rather Dean views his role of teacher as explaining things to his son and being open with him about more adult concepts or topics in order for him to grow and learn and understand the world. Instead of limiting his son's exposure to this type of content, he uses these situations as "teachable" moments.

Kristen described teaching her son values and morals regarding how to treat others:

[Son] has the nurturing and loving side of me. For example, I took him to the movies a few weeks ago and a woman walked in. It was already dark, they had just dimmed the lights up on the aisle, and she couldn't make it down there, and [son] got up from his seat and walked her down the aisle and sat her down. She

was like “oh, what a nice boy.” These are the things that I try to teach. He talks to people. He opens doors for the elderly. I am trying to teach him to be that kid too. Kristen emphasizes *teaching* her son to be kind, considerate, and thoughtful. These are characteristics she believes she possesses, and wants to pass them down to her son. Each of these nonresidential parents has a different method of teaching their children, but they all have the same goal of providing guidance for them as to how to do things, think about things, and behave. These are life lessons that will shape their children into the people they will become.

**Physical well-being – involvement.** The tenth method nonresidential parents described for enacting parenting was *physical well-being – involvement* ( $n = 6$ ; 8%). *Physical well-being – involvement* refers to nonresidential parents’ involvement in issues related to their children’s physical health and well-being. These behaviors included attending doctor’s appointments with their children, caring for their children when they are sick, and being mindful of any signs that their children may have been physically abused. For example, Candice described the lengths she goes to in order to attend her child’s doctor’s appointments: “I rearrange my entire schedule to make sure that I am at those [doctor’s] appointments; no matter what it is I do my best.” This nonresidential mother makes it a priority to attend these appointments for her child. Candice also has a residential daughter, and she described prioritizing her nonresidential daughter’s healthcare above her residential daughter and her concern that her residential daughter will begin to internalize this and believe that she is not as important to her mother as her nonresidential sister; however, Candice believes these doctor’s appointments are so important to attend that that is a chance she is willing to take at this time.

Mary has a two-year-old daughter with whom she has visitation every other weekend. After picking her daughter up from daycare, “I bring her back here and check her for any scratches, bruises, any signs of abuse.” This nonresidential mother has no communication whatsoever with the residential parent of her child, so this is the only means of information-gathering this mother feels she has regarding her daughter’s physical well-being. In these instances, nonresidential parents enacted their parental role by ensuring their children’s health and well-being through their involvement in these issues.

**Co-parenting.** The eleventh, and final, method of enacting parenting that participants described was *co-parenting* ( $n = 5$ ; 13%). *Co-parenting* refers to instances where nonresidential parents described working together with the residential parent in order to function as a parental unit. One common method participants reported using to co-parent was consistency between homes. For example, Stana described adapting her ex-husband’s (the residential parent) house rules:

What I try to do for consistency’s sake is to get an idea from [residential parent] what perimeters [son] is used to living with so that they don’t so radically change when he is with me, so that I don’t become the Disney parent, that what the limits and boundaries are there are consistent and respected here.

This is different from *disciplining*, even though both categories refer to rules, because this nonresidential mother emphasizes working together and communicating with the residential parent in order to provide her son with a consistent and united front across both homes.

Xander described discussing parenting issues with his ex-wife (the residential parent):

My ex-wife asks for my advice often... when my oldest child has some issue and she is concerned about something and that raises a concern in my ex-wife, she will call me and we will talk about how best to deal with that.

This nonresidential father engages in parenting conversations with the residential parent in order to come up with ideas for handling issues with their child. Xander and his ex-wife discuss these issues together, and then come up with a parenting plan for how to address these situations with their daughter together. In these examples, the nonresidential parents are enacting their parenting through *co-parenting* with the residential parents of their children. These eleven categories of methods nonresidential parents employ to enact their parental role illustrate the ways in which these individuals attempt to parent their children. They also highlight the complexities involved in being a parent while at the same time being nonresidential.

### **Communication Challenges for Nonresidential Parents**

RQ3 asked what communication challenges nonresidential parents experience within their relationships with their children. Participants described communication challenges with their relationships with their children 106 times within the data. Inductive analysis of these excerpts resulted in the identification of four major categories of communication challenges: the *residential parent*, *difficult topics*, the *children's refusal to communicate*, and *limits of mediated communication*. See Table 4 for a complete list of these communication challenges, as well as examples of messages coded into these categories, and message and participant *Ns* for each.

**Residential parent.** By far the most commonly reported communication challenge nonresidential parents experienced within their relationships with their children was the *residential parent* ( $n = 52$ ; 90%). This category is divided into three sub-categories: *gatekeeping* ( $n = 37$ ; 60%), *monitored communication* ( $n = 8$ ; 15%), and *defamation* ( $n = 7$ ; 15%). *Gatekeeping* was the most common method residential parents employed to create barriers to the nonresidential parents' abilities to communicate with their children. Scholars have written about *gatekeeping* as the actions of the residential parent to control and limit the interactions between the nonresidential parent and the child (Rollie, 2006; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994). Here participants described the residential parents of their children constraining their ability to communicate with their children by restricting telephone calls, not allowing the nonresidential parent to speak with their children when they attempt to call, and denying or limiting the nonresidential parent's visitation time. For example, Dean described his inability to communicate with his son through the telephone due to his ex-wife (the residential parent): "I know I cannot call him [son] because my ex-wife will not let me talk to him." Here Dean does not even engage in *keeping in touch* behaviors, even though he might want to, because he believes there is no point; that his ex-wife will not allow it. Dean is resigned to the fact that *gatekeeping* is going to occur, and therefore does not even attempt to telephone his son anymore. Blaine has similar challenges, as his ex-wife also limits the telephone interaction he can have with his children:

I have called every single night, but I have not spoken to them every night because she frequently does not answer the phone or takes the phone off the hook. I would say about once a week I get a recording that my call did not go through

and I am quite certain she does not have phone problems. I think she just decides she does not want me talking to them, and she in fact emailed me before and said that she does not want me calling every night because it interferes with her time with the kids, which I find to be rather amusing.

In each of these instances, the residential parent is acting as a gatekeeper by limiting these nonresidential parents' abilities to communicate through the telephone with their children. Blaine still attempts to telephone his children on a regular basis even though this *gatekeeping* occurs, and sometimes is able to speak with them.

In other instances, residential parents acted as gatekeepers by limiting the nonresidential parents' visitation time with their children even when they were legally entitled to that visitation time according to their custody agreement. Mary described how her ex-husband (the residential father) denied her visitation time with her daughter:

He kept her away for two months, two consecutive months. So I always, I get afraid a lot of times, especially around holidays, like today I worry that just because it's Valentine's Day that he is going to keep her away from me.

This nonresidential mother is legally entitled to have face-to-face visitation with her daughter every other weekend; however, she is constantly on pins and needles as to whether she will in fact be able to have visitation. Sometimes when Mary arrives to pick up her daughter from daycare, her daughter is not there and she knows she is not going to have her visitation that weekend. This is especially true around holidays, as her ex-husband is more inclined to deny visitation on holidays.

Elena also described her ex-husband (the residential father) limiting her visitation time with her children: "he always prevented the extended visits. Holidays he would try

to prevent a lot of them, saying that they had family things and they would be out of town.” This nonresidential mother was supposed to have extended visitation time with her children during the summer, but was never able to take advantage of that, and just like with Mary above, her face-to-face time with her children during holidays was limited by her ex-husband. In each of these examples, the residential parent has created a communication challenge for the nonresidential parent due to limiting their access to their children.

The second sub-category within the *residential parent* category is *monitored communication*. *Monitored communication* refers to instances where the residential parent monitors communication between the nonresidential parent and the child, which impedes their ability to communicate openly. Knowing that the residential parent is eavesdropping on their conversations creates another challenge for nonresidential parents in communicating within their relationships with their children. Meg described the challenges she experiences when communicating with her daughter through Skype due to the residential father who monitors their conversations:

She does not tell me anything even when we Skype. She answers a couple quick questions like when I asked “oh how are you doing? How is your school?” She says “okay.” It seems like she hesitates to tell me through Skype because sometimes she knows that her dad is around, so she does not tell her honest feelings and it is totally different from before, because she was really honest and she was really open to me when she was with me.

Meg used to be the residential parent to her child and felt she and her daughter communicated openly and honestly during that time. Now that her daughter is living

abroad with her father, she feels as though her communication is very limited due to the residential father and his eavesdropping. Similarly, Candice has a difficult time communicating with her son through email or text messages because she believes her ex-husband (the residential father) and his wife monitor these interactions:

My son does not check his email every day and dad and stepmom also have the login, so they can monitor anything I say and sometimes I can text him, but I know that anything that I say is probably going to be read.

Here the nonresidential mother feels constrained in her communication with her son due to her suspicions that her ex-husband and his wife are monitoring those communication technologies. This impacts the content of these emails and text messages, as Candice must craft these messages with the knowledge that her ex-husband and his wife might read them.

*Monitored communication* was also a communication challenge nonresidential fathers experienced. For example, the only “visitation time” Malcolm has with his children are his weekly, one-hour Skype conversations; however, these interactions have become problematic because his ex-wife (the residential mother) has been eavesdropping on their conversations and attempting to use these interactions as leverage during court proceedings:

She has eavesdropped on our sessions and presented things to her attorney that got blown out of proportion... my 10-year-old was having excruciating headaches and mom did not believe her and that went on for weeks. Mom did not believe her. So finally I took her to the doctor and they did an eye exam and said “oh, here is the source of her headaches.” Then not long after that is when basically I



ended up having to relocate [when Skype visitation began] so I would ask [daughter] about her headaches. “Oh, I still have them.” “Well, have you let your mom know that you need glasses?” “Yes, but she does not care.” Mom heard that and what mom presented, well what opposing council presented, was that I was asking my daughter about her headaches and the status of her glasses in an effort to expose mom as a poor caregiver to these girls... So that is one of many examples, so I just have learned I do not allow nor do I initiate conversation that in any way, under anybody’s eyes, could be misconstrued as me trying to feed these girls to see what their mother is. How would you like a conversation like that? It is not easy.

Malcolm was attempting to follow-up on a healthcare related issue with one of his daughters; however, the fact that his ex-wife was listening in during this conversation created legal troubles for this father. Now he is extremely cautious about what he says during these Skype conversations and since these are his only means of interacting with his daughters at this time, his communication with them is severely limited and unsatisfactory. Not only that, but this monitoring also impedes his ability to enact his parenting as he is now no longer able to engage in *physical well-being – involvement* behaviors.

The third sub-category within the *residential parent* category is *defamation*. In these instances, the residential parent has spoken ill of the nonresidential parent to the child, which in turn has had negative repercussions on the nonresidential parent’s interactions with their child. Steven described the negative impact his ex-wife (the residential parent) has had on his interactions with his children by speaking ill of him:

I've had incidents with my son and my oldest daughter where they've acted up and I'm like, "you do not treat me like that, I'm your father." They're like "well I've heard what an S.O.B. you've been for so many years that I don't have to listen to you."

In this situation, because his ex-wife had been speaking negatively about him for years, his children no longer respect him as a parent, and as a result, their parent/child interactions have been negative and destructive. His ability to discipline his children is limited by the defamation that has taken place.

Kristen also described *defamation* as a communication challenge she experiences when communicating with her eight-year-old son:

I picked [son] up a couple of weeks ago, and he had tears in his eyes, and I was like, "buddy what's up? What's the matter, did you have a bad day at school, with a teacher or somebody else? Calm down." He was like, "Mom did you give me away?" I was like, "what?" He goes, "did you give me away?" I said, "I most certainly did not, where are you getting this information?" He started crying and looked out the window and back and he said that "[residential stepmother] said you were a fucking bitch and that she didn't believe that a mother could give her own child away."

The content of this message is considerably malicious and derogatory and appears to have caused her son distress. Kristen described the discomfort and emotional pain of having to address his stepmother's comments with him and how angry she felt that someone would say this to her son. Similarly, Veronica has struggled with communicating with her son after he has been told negative things about her:

As of late, my children have been telling me they don't want to talk to me, or there was one time that my ex-husband [residential parent] told them to tell me that they do not want to talk to me anymore – that is what they said. It has gotten more difficult. I have been accused of lying. My son has accused me of lying. My son has told me that I need to send him more money so that their dad can take care of them. I've been called a drug addict by my son, that I left them because I did not want to take care of them anymore, and a seven-year-old can't come up with the stuff. They had to have heard it from their dad and none of that is true.

The conversations this nonresidential mother has been having with her children, especially her son, have become increasingly difficult and she believes this is due to her ex-husband communicating negative things about her to the children. Her children are limiting their communication with her and she believes this is due to derogatory things her ex-husband says about her, because she is not sure where her young children would get this information if they were not being told these things. In each of these examples, the residential parent defaming the nonresidential parent to the children has created a barrier to nonresidential parent/child communication that is difficult for the nonresidential parent to overcome.

**Difficult topics.** The second category of communication challenges nonresidential parents reported experiencing within their relationships with their children is *difficult topics* ( $n = 20$ ; 45%). This category is divided into two sub-categories: *not defaming the residential parent* ( $n = 10$ ; 25%) and *difficult topics – general* ( $n = 10$ ; 20%).

*Not defaming the residential parent* refers to struggles with not speaking negatively about the residential parent to their children. These participants recognized

and identified that, while it is difficult not to say negative things, it is also best for their children that they do not speak ill of the other parent. Lanie explained this challenge:

I find it difficult to talk about issues with their dad or when they come to me and say “why is dad doing this?” It’s hard to discuss that with them because I don’t want to give away too much, and I don’t want to have one-sided information or “your dad’s just a jerk” or something like that. I don’t want to put out those negative terms because I don’t want them to internalize that too much.

Lanie finds it difficult to talk to her children about their residential father. She does not want to say negative things about him because she believes it would be hurtful to her children to hear those remarks; however, in these instances it is her children that are bringing him up in conversation. This creates a difficult situation for Lanie, who wants to be honest and authentic with her children, but also does not want to defame her children’s father.

Similarly, Ryan noted that not speaking ill of his ex-wife (the residential parent) was:

...very challenging. Especially when the kids come complaining about it, or are really hurt by it. That is very challenging. Especially if I know what happened or what was going on and I knew that she was in the wrong. It makes it very challenging.

In this example, as in Lanie’s above, it is Ryan’s children who want to discuss their mother and Ryan feels uncomfortable with this (just as Lanie does), because he is unsure how to address his children’s questions and complaints without speaking ill of his ex-wife.

Emily also reported *not defaming the residential parent* as a communication challenge she experiences:

I now have to be a little careful because something I say, something that maybe under my breath or something, I have to be careful with how I refer to my ex-husband and talk about him to my son.

In Emily's case, this is more of a general difficulty with not saying negative things about the residential father. She described having to monitor her own communication so that she does not accidentally let something negative slip in front of her son. Due to differences in parenting styles, as well as the relational history that often characterizes ex-spousal relationships, these nonresidential parents found it challenging not to defame the residential parents. These participants reported a heightened awareness for what they say about the residential parent, which can become stressful and result in less than authentic communication between parent and child.

The second sub-category within *difficult topics* is *difficult topics – general*, which is comprised of instances where the nonresidential parent does not want to address certain topics or feels they are in a position where they are not able to communicate about certain topics with their children. Topics that nonresidential parents described as difficult include how much they miss their children due to their nonresidential status, the residential parent's new significant other, and address terms – namely, how much it bothers the nonresidential parent that their child refers to their residential parent's partner as "father" or "mother." For example, Malcolm described how difficult the topic of how much he loves and misses his daughters is to address with his children:

I voluntarily took a fathering class with a licensed social worker and she said it is not a good thing, and it is looked upon badly for me to communicate to my children how much I love them and how much I miss them, because then that creates or possibly spawns a sense of distress in the child, and I am kind of stuck there... They know what I love them but I do not believe that I am allowed to convey that to them at all.

The advice that this nonresidential father received now makes him feel uncomfortable expressing his love for his children, yet he also feels uncomfortable *not* expressing these feelings to them. This situation has created a deep sense of distress for this nonresidential father, who does not know what he should and should not communicate to his daughters. He feels restricted in his expression of affection and attachment towards them.

Similarly, Alan described not being able to communicate to his five-year-old daughter how much he misses her, because when he does she becomes distressed:

It is hard for me to talk to her about [being a nonresidential parent] because she is so young. Me missing her, like I cannot say, I try not to say "I miss you" so much because I have said that before and she has gotten really upset and just sad... I try not to. I cannot talk about how I really feel about it.

Again, Alan feels that he is not able to express his feelings about his parental situation and how much he misses his daughter when he is not with her. While communicating that one loves and misses someone is generally perceived as an assurance, in this case these messages become a barrier to communication between the nonresidential parent and the child.

**Children's refusal to communicate.** The third category of communication challenges is *children's refusal to communicate* ( $n = 19$ ; 40%), which is divided into two sub-categories: *lack of intimate communication* ( $n = 13$ ; 25%) and *stonewalling* ( $n = 6$ ; 15%). *Lack of intimate communication* refers to instances where the children refuse to communicate with the nonresidential parent about intimate/personal topics. This category is different from *difficult topics - general* because in the latter category it was the nonresidential parent who did not want to communicate about certain topics. For example, Jared described wanting to speak with his son (who currently lives with his maternal grandparents) about his biological mother, but his son refuses:

I would like to talk more about... his feelings towards his mother because he has not seen his mother in like two years now, so that is one of the things that I would like to talk about more, but we don't. He does not want to talk about it at all.

Every time I bring it up he just shuts it down.

Jared's son lived predominantly with his mother after the divorce; however, his mother had drug dependency issues and eventually lost custody of him. Jared would like to talk to his son about those years he was living with his mother while she was using; however, his son refuses to discuss the issue. Similarly, Candice described communication problems she had with her daughter: "That is one of the struggles I have with my daughter, is that there are things that happened when she was younger, that she should have told me about back then but she did not feel that she could." Candice's daughter was molested by a stepsibling when she was young, but was afraid to tell her mother about it; however, she did disclose this information to her other siblings and her residential father.

Her daughter's unwillingness to tell her mother about this situation resulted in this nonresidential mother feeling alienated from her daughters.

Other participants described a general feeling of emotional distance between themselves and their children due to a *lack of intimate communication* within the relationship. For example, Ryan discussed how his relationship with his son changed after the divorce:

My son and I were extremely close. When I was married my son would never leave my side, never. He was always with daddy and it wasn't a choice that I made. I was always asking him "do you want to go with your mom, do you want to do this" and he was always "no, I want to be with Dad." When we were divorced though, that's changed a bit because my son doesn't want to take sides with either one of us. So I really feel that he has distanced himself, which truly breaks my heart because at times I feel like I'm losing him emotionally.

Ryan is unhappy with the content of his communication with his son, because he believes his son is no longer communicating openly with him. In an attempt to be neutral for both of his parents, this son is distancing himself from his nonresidential father, and this father does not know how to overcome this communication challenge. In these situations, the nonresidential parents feel their children are holding back on them by refusing to engage in intimate interactions, either about specific topics or just a general lack of openness and intimacy in their communication within their relationships.

The other sub-category within *children's refusal to communicate* is *stonewalling*. According to Gottman (1994; 1999), stonewalling occurs when an individual signals withdrawal from the interaction through both verbal and nonverbal messages. In these



instances, interacting with stonewallers is literally like interacting with a stone wall. Here participants reported their children have communicated to their nonresidential parents that they no longer want to have a relationship with them, and do not want to engage in any further communication with them. For example, Leah reported that her children refuse to answer the telephone when she calls, or to return her messages: “my messages are not returned. My calls are not returned and the phone is not answered.” Here the children are stonewalling her by refusing to engage her in conversation. Similarly, Gina has struggled with her nonresidential son (and residential daughter), both teenagers, who do not want to have a relationship with her. While her children do follow the visitation schedule she and her ex-husband (the residential father) currently have in place, she claimed the only reason they do this is because if they did not show up for visitation there would be legal consequences for their father. The following is how she described the climate of her home, and her relationships with her children:

It is *weird* because I live in a house with two children and there is no connection between *any* of us. We are strangers. We are not family. We have no bonds of affection towards, I mean I love my kids, but they do not accept it, so, and they have no gratitude, no empathy, no compassion... So it is cold. It is dark and it is cold. This is not a home. This is a house with three people who are not connected. It is not a family. They cannot wait until they turn 18 and they can get the hell away from me and never come back.

This has been an extremely difficult situation for Gina. She has become alienated from her children, who have stonewalled her and she does not know what she can do to overcome this communication challenge. Gina sees her children on a regular basis, but

her relationships with them are cold and distant. There is no intimacy or closeness between them.

**Limits of mediated communication.** The fourth and final category of communication challenges nonresidential parents reported was the *limits of mediated communication* ( $n = 15$ ; 23%). This category is comprised of instances where participants described communication technologies as creating a barrier to communicating with their children. Examples of these barriers include children not communicating effectively via the telephone due to age or other barriers such as ADHD, the limits of communicating closeness and affection over the phone, and general difficulties with attempting to parent predominantly over the telephone.

Quinn valued the time she used to spend reading books with her son when she was a residential parent. After the divorce she became a nonresidential mother, and reading became a source of sadness instead of joy. According to this nonresidential mother:

I've actually tried to [read books to him] while I'm on the phone or Skype. I've tried to do the book reading thing, especially with my son and he just won't have any part of it. That part is hard.

Quinn is attempting to parent the way that she parented when she was a residential mother. Because she used to read books with him then, she is still trying to maintain that aspect of their relationship, even now that she has transitioned to nonresidential parenting. This has become problematic for her because her son is unwilling to adapt this behavior (book-reading) to a new format (Skype) and she is left feeling sad and unfulfilled. While technology provides a greater variety of potential communication

channels these parents can employ to stay connected with their children, for many of these participants these technologies are not the equivalent of face-to-face parent/child interaction, and therefore become a new source of frustration. Similarly, Alan described the limitations and the frustrations of attempting to communicate with his five-year-old daughter using technology:

She [daughter] does not want to ever, like ever, she never wants to talk on the phone... she does not really like talking on the phone at all, which is hard because the times that we do to talk on the phone they are totally non-satisfactory to me, because she is preoccupied with something else or it is not what I wanted... I have Skyped with her before, but she just gets infatuated with the screen and she does not really pay any attention to me so it's cool to see her, but again it is kind of like the phone call. It is not exactly what I want to get out of it.

Technology has become a barrier to communicating with his daughter, as this participant is not able to get what he desires and what he needs from these interactions. These interactions are bittersweet for Alan as he gets to “see” his daughter on the webcam, but is not actually able to communicate with her through this format. Because Alan’s daughter lives in another part of the country, his communication with her is severely limited, which has been a continued source of frustration for him. As a result he is planning to move across the country so that he can be closer, and therefore able to spend more face-to-face time with her.

Terrance also described the *limits of mediated communication* as a barrier in communicating closeness with his children.

On the phone is, well, more difficult, trying to express yourself over the phone.

The best you can do is “I love you” and when you hang up with my daughter you give her a kiss over the phone, and the son “oh, I love you man.” It’s difficult over the phone.

Terrance addresses the limits of communicating affection over the telephone. While he can attempt to communicate his feelings, giving his daughter a kiss over the phone is not the same as actually being able to kiss her. While technology is an important and valuable means for these parents to stay in touch with their children, it also presents an additional source of frustration because there are inherent limits placed on the interaction due to the technology, which can be difficult for nonresidential parents who desperately want to maintain relationships with their children.

In sum, these results indicate the complexities involved in nonresidential parenting. Respondents identified eight categories that comprise the nonresidential parent role. Participants reported a variety of parenting behaviors they employ to enact their parenting, and described four categories of communication challenges they experience in their relationships with their children. In the next chapter, these results will be discussed in relation to the previous literature on nonresidential parenting, and associations between these categories will be presented and explained.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

The present study provided an in-depth examination of how nonresidential parents conceptualize their parent roles, how they enact parenting with their children, and the communication challenges they experience within their relationships with their children. In this section, the results of each RQ will be summarized and described within the context of the pre-existing literature on nonresidential parenting. Based on these results, theoretical connections will also be offered and directions for future research will be presented.

### RQ1 – Role Conceptualization

RQ1 asked how nonresidential parents conceptualize their role as “parents.” Participants described their parental roles a total of 130 times within the data. Inductive analysis resulted in the identification of eight nonresidential parental roles: *limited role* ( $n = 32$ ; 55%), *active participant* ( $n = 28$ ; 55%), *nurturer* ( $n = 20$ ; 48%), *provider – tangible* ( $n = 17$ ; 38%), *teacher* ( $n = 14$ ; 33%), *sole parent* ( $n = 9$ ; 13%), *co-parent* ( $n = 8$ ; 20%), and *disciplinarian* ( $n = 2$ ; 5%). These results illustrate the variety within nonresidential parents’ conceptualizations of their parent roles.

Scholars have noted one of the primary challenges post-divorce, nonresidential parents experience is role ambiguity (Minton & Pasley, 1996; Rollie, 2006). This role ambiguity is rooted within the structural changes that are taking place within the family. After a divorce, one parent may become a primary residential parent to the child, whereas the other parent may have legally authorized visitation time. In these instances, the nonresidential parent is forced to adapt their parental role definitions based on their nonresidential status. This process can cause distress for parents who now suffer from an

inability to enact parenting as they did in the past (Rollie). Results of the current study indicate that while the role of the nonresidential parent is not yet institutionalized within the United States (Arditti, 1995), these parents are able to define and describe their parental role(s) as they view them.

**Evidence for a microstructural perspective.** The existing research on nonresidential parenting has focused on two competing viewpoints regarding parenting: the gender system perspective and the microstructural perspective (Hawkins et al., 2006). Results from previous research have been mixed, with some support for the gender system perspective (Hawkins et al.) and some support for the microstructural perspective (Arditti, 1995; Stewart, 1999a; 1999b). Both nonresidential mothers and nonresidential fathers were interviewed for the current study in order to explore these two perspectives. Results of the current study provide additional evidence for the microstructural perspective.

Results of the present analysis indicated that both nonresidential mothers and fathers included *provider – tangible* within their parental role conceptualizations. Furthermore, both nonresidential fathers and mothers emphasized being a *nurturer* as part of their parental role. These two parental roles have been historically gendered, yet the results of this study indicate these roles are not as straightforward for these nonresidential parents. When asked about parental roles and responsibilities, each participant was also asked whether they believe parental roles are the same for mothers and fathers, or whether they believe there are role differences. Many participants ( $n = 25$ ), both mothers ( $n = 12$ ) and fathers ( $n = 13$ ), said there were no differences. They identified that

stereotypes exist regarding the roles of mother and father; however, they personally did not subscribe to that view.

The participants ( $n = 15$ ) who did agree that there are role differences between mothers and fathers were asked to describe these differences. Within these responses, two themes emerged. First, participants ( $n = 8$ ) discussed conversational topics and activities that they believe are more gendered. For example, Dean said that he believed it was his responsibility as the father to teach his son how to hunt. Alan said that mothers should talk to their daughters about sexuality, whereas fathers should talk to sons about those issues. These examples do not provide support for a gendered perspective in relationship to parental *roles*; rather they highlight the preferences of some parents to address certain topics and activities with their same-sex children.

Second, participants ( $n = 7$ ) described traditional differences between mothers as nurturers and fathers as providers. Of these participants, mothers ( $n = 6$ ) described a mother's love and nurturing as unique from the love a father provides. For example, Veronica said:

I think moms tend to be more nurturing. I think the mom is kind of like the mother hen of her children. I think moms and dads think differently, just by genetic make-up or just by the way we are different as men and women. I think it is different also, because, and I will speak for myself, I fell in love with my kids when they were in utero.

Veronica did not say that fathers are not or cannot be nurturing, rather she focused on her experience as a mother and how a mother's love is different from that of a father, in part, due to the fact that she felt an emotional attachment to her children during her pregnancy.

Like Veronica, these mothers who described gender differences all emphasized the unique nature of a mother's love. The only father in this sample who described sex differences in relation to parental roles claimed parental responsibilities are different for mothers and fathers because fathers are more responsible for providing for the children, and, therefore spend less time with them, because they work more. According to Javier, "I think it is not the same, because the father spends less time with the kids because they have to work more than the mom."

Taken together, results of RQ1 indicate that while some participants identified traditional sex differences based on providing and nurturing, these parents seemed to focus more on their nonresidential status than they did on their gender. This supports the growing body of literature on sex differences (or the lack thereof) (Barnett & Rivers, 2004; Dindia & Allen, 1992; Dindia & Canary, 2006) and is perhaps indicative of a shift in the way that society understands parenting. These results do not support the notion that being a good nonresidential father simply means being a good provider. These nonresidential fathers described their parental role as much more complex and consisting of nurturing, teaching, and participating in the lives of their children. Similarly, these nonresidential mothers also described the importance of being providers for their children.

## **RQ2 – Enacting Parenting**

RQ2 asked how nonresidential parents report enacting parenting. Participants described methods they employ to enact parenting 176 times within the data. Inductive analysis resulted in the identification of 11 methods nonresidential parents employ to enact parenting: *school involvement* ( $n = 37$ ; 78%), *spending time together* ( $n = 28$ ; 70%),



*keeping in touch* ( $n = 23$ ; 40%), *assurances* ( $n = 19$ ; 38%), *providing – tangible* ( $n = 18$ ; 33%), *showing physical affection* ( $n = 15$ ; 35%), *supporting – emotional* ( $n = 12$ ; 25%), *disciplining* ( $n = 7$ ; 18%), *teaching* ( $n = 6$ ; 15%), *physical well-being – involvement* ( $n = 6$ ; 8%), and *co-parenting* ( $n = 5$ ; 13%).

Previous research on nonresidential parenting has quantitatively explored the relationship between nonresidential fathers' authoritative parenting behaviors and child development (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Harper & Fine, 2006; Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman, & Conger, 1994). Gray and Steinberg (1999) listed the three main dimensions of authoritative parenting as acceptance-involvement, strictness-supervision, and psychological-autonomy granting. According to Amato and Gilbreth, authoritative parenting behaviors include “listening to children’s problems, giving advice, providing explanations for rules, monitoring children’s school performance, helping with homework, engaging in projects with children, and using noncoercive discipline to deal with misbehavior” (p. 561). Simons et al. also included praising accomplishments as an authoritative parenting behavior. The present study did not explore child outcomes and instead explored the methods nonresidential parents employ to enact their parenting; however, results of this analysis indicate these participants engage in many authoritative parenting activities (*school involvement, disciplining, supporting – emotional, and assurances*). The previous research is primarily focused on nonresidential fathering behaviors, while the present study illustrates that nonresidential mothers also participate in these authoritative parenting behaviors. In addition, these results indicate that nonresidential parents (both mothers and fathers) also engaged in parenting behaviors that are not frequently included under the definition of authoritative parenting (*keeping in*

*touch, spending time together*). These other parenting behaviors emphasize the development and maintenance of relational bonds, which previous research has also examined (Harper & Fine, 2006; Sobolewski & King, 2005). This previous research again focused on the relationship between nonresidential fathering behaviors and child well-being. While these recreational activities do not emphasize education and discipline, they still function to support the nonresidential father/child bond (Sobolewski & King). Instead of labeling these behaviors as indicative of the “Disneyland Dad” as society is in the habit of doing, perhaps these behaviors should be reconsidered as a means of relational maintenance within the confines of the structural limitations of nonresidential parenting.

**Evidence for a microstructural perspective.** When comparing the responses of mothers and fathers in this sample, a few differences between these groups of participants emerged. For example, the *disciplinarian* role was only mentioned by two participants (both fathers); however, these results should not be used as evidence of the gender system perspective. Within parents’ reports of methods they employ for enacting parenting, nonresidential mothers ( $n = 4$ ) also provided examples of *disciplining*. In other words, when describing their parental roles, these mothers did not identify *disciplinarian*, yet they still reported engaging in these behaviors. These results illustrate two things. First, nonresidential parents’ role conceptualizations did not clearly translate into enacting parenting behaviors. Some parents talked about certain roles, and then provided examples of their parenting that fit within other roles that they did not identify as part of their parental role. This is evident in the example about *disciplinarian* and *disciplining* above. Second, the gender difference reported here could be more a product of role socialization.

Women are socialized to be more nurturing, whereas men are socialized to be disciplinarians. It is possible that when nonresidential mothers were asked about their parental roles, they did not consider *disciplinarian* because that does not fit with how they view motherhood; however, upon inspection of their actual behaviors it is evident that some of these mothers are still enacting this particular role.

**Role conceptualization, role enactment, and a hierarchy of salience.** Because individuals have a variety of identities from which they must select in a given instance, a “hierarchy of salience” is required so that one may choose the identity that is most salient within a given situation (Stryker, 1968, p. 560). According to this hierarchy of salience, the identity that is most relevant within a given context will inform the individual’s role performance. This hierarchy of salience is illustrated through the results of RQ2. Many of the enacting parenting behaviors can be understood using a “two sides of the same coin” metaphor. For example, *spending time together* and *keeping in touch* were both identified by participants as methods they employ to enact parenting. These behaviors are complementary, in that when these parents are physically with their children they are able to enact parenting through *spending time together*; however, when they are not physically with their children they instead enact parenting through *keeping in touch*. Similarly, *assurances* can take the place of physical affection when the nonresidential parent is unable to show affection physically due to distance. The substitution of *assurances* for *showing physical affection* was evident within the data, as participants described the use of *assurances* when they were asked how they communicate closeness with their children when they are not physically with them. *Keeping in touch* and *assurances* are both examples of how one can enact parenting given the limited nature of the nonresidential

role. These parents are modifying their parenting behaviors out of necessity in order to maintain the parental identity in the face of structural limitations that are placed on their parenting. For parents in this sample, this was manifested in their ability to switch from behaviors like *spending time together* and *physical affection* to *keeping in touch* and *assurances*.

These results provide further evidence for the microstructural perspective, as the parents in this sample modified the way they enact parenting (e.g., *spending time together/keeping in touch, physical affection/assurances*) to fit the opportunities for parenting that were available to them. Because these parents are not always able to spend face-to-face time with their children, they must create alternative ways to parent, which is what many of these parents described.

### **RQ3 – Communication Challenges**

RQ3 asked what communication challenges nonresidential parents experience within their relationships with their children. Participants described communication challenges a total of 106 times within the data. Inductive analysis resulted in the identification of four categories of communication challenges: the *residential parent* ( $n = 52$ ; 90%), *difficult topics* ( $n = 20$ ; 45%), the *children's refusal to communicate* ( $n = 19$ ; 40%), and *limits of mediated communication* ( $n = 15$ ; 23%).

Braithwaite and Baxter (2006) explored nonresidential parent/child communication from the perspective of the children using relational dialectics theory, and results indicated two common barriers. First, children reported struggling between the desire for their nonresidential parents to actively participate in parenting, while at the same time not wanting their nonresidential parents involved in parenting. Second, these

children had a desire for an open relationship with their nonresidential parents, while at the same time desiring less intimate communication with their nonresidential parent. The researchers described these tensions as “parenting and not parenting” and “openness and closedness” (Braithwaite & Baxter, p. 36 & 39).

The present study provides another perspective on communication challenges within these relationships – that of the nonresidential parent. While the current study did not use relational dialectics as a theoretical framework, it is still possible to draw similarities between the findings of these studies. While children reported parenting and not parenting, participants of the current study reported wanting to enact parenting, but experiencing challenges (such as *gatekeeping*) which prevented them from being able to parent the way they desired. Put another way, while the children of these nonresidential parents described a simultaneous desire for their parents to both parent and not parent, participants in the present study described the various ways in which they attempt to parent (RQ2) and various communication challenges that create barriers to their ability to parent (RQ3). Taken together, these results indicate the complexity of these behaviors and the different perspectives of parents and children. Children see this as an either/or scenario – either they parent or they do not parent – and expressed a desire for both of these competing behaviors. Nonresidential parents describe this as a limited situation – they are limited based on structural aspects of their parents’ situation and the various communication challenges they experience.

Braithwaite and Baxter (2006) found that children desired to have both openness and closedness in their relationships with their parents. This desire is manifested within the results of the current investigation, as nonresidential parents reported engaging in

intimate communication with their children (*supporting – emotionally*), while also describing their children's *lack of intimate communication* as a communication challenge. These parents found their children's *lack of intimate communication* challenging, yet also described topics that they themselves did not like to discuss with their children, such as their feelings toward the residential parents. Both children and nonresidential parents are struggling with a desire for both openness and closedness in their parent/child relationships. In Braithwaite and Baxter's study, participants reported a desire for intimate communication with their nonresidential parents; however, described the difficulty of engaging in open communication because their nonresidential parents are not familiar with their everyday life. Because these parents are removed from their children due to residential separation, these children find it difficult to communicate with their parents about their lives. For these children, their parents' inability to participate in their daily lives limits their perceived ability to openly communicate with them.

Results of the current study illustrate that nonresidential parents also experience difficulties due to their lack of daily, residential interaction with their children. These parents perceived that their ability to parent was limited due to the nonresidential component of their relationship. The ways in which respondents reported enacting parenting were also influenced by the perceived limitations of their parental role. Because these parents are not able to be physically present with their children each day, they emphasized engaging in activities such as *keeping in touch* and *assurances* in order to communicate to their children that their parents are still active in their lives. Results of both the current study and those of Braithwaite and Baxter (2006) illustrate the complexity of maintaining parent/child bonds in nonresidential situations. Children want

(but at the same time do not want) closeness, and parents want closeness, but their ability to *obtain* it is limited. The communication challenges reported by respondents in the current investigation further complicate this situation, and the *residential parent* and *limits of mediated communication* provide additional barriers that limit these parents' ability to maintain an active presence in the lives of their children. These mothers and fathers feel limited in their ability to parent over the phone, and/or in light of a residential parent that restricts their access to the children. Taken together, the results of the current study alongside those of Braithwaite and Baxter illustrate the complexity of nonresidential relationships, and provide initial scholarly understanding of the communication challenges that are experienced within these relationships.

**Communication challenges and sex differences.** Both mothers and fathers in this sample described a variety of communication challenges they experience within their relationships with their children. These parents did not report different challenges based on sex; both mothers and fathers reported experiencing all four types of communication challenges. For these participants, the nonresidential component seems to be more central to their descriptions of their communication challenges than does their gender.

For example, the most commonly reported communication challenge that these nonresidential parents experienced within their relationships with their children was the *residential parent*. The most common challenge created by residential parents, as reported by these participants, was *gatekeeping*. Previous research has also described *gatekeeping* as a barrier to nonresidential parent/child involvement (Carlson & Högnäs, 2010; Minton & Pasley, 1996; Rollie, 2006; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994). While the current findings support this previous research, it is important to note that the current

results also extend the research on gatekeeping. Previous research on gatekeeping focused on residential mothers acting as gatekeepers by controlling the degree of contact between nonresidential fathers and their children. Results of the present study illustrate that residential fathers also act as gatekeepers, limiting nonresidential mothers' access to their children.

Perhaps one reason why sex differences did not emerge within these results is due to the nature of RQ3, which specifically addressed communication challenges these parents experience within their relationships *with their children*. It is possible that an exploration of general communication challenges these parents experience, rather than those just with/regarding their children, might have provided different and more gendered results. Kartch and Tenzek (2012) explored communication challenges nonresidential mothers experience in their relationships, not only with their children, but also with residential caregivers and their social networks. Results indicated these mothers perceived a lack of available social support from their social networks due to social stigma and judgment. These nonresidential mothers felt stigmatized because they perceived that others were judging them for being nonresidential mothers. In her auto-ethnography about life as a nonresidential mother, Eicher-Catt (2004) described the difficulty of disclosing to others that she was a nonresidential mother, and explained that due to social stigma she would attempt to avoid telling others about her nonresidential status. Nonresidential mothers who participated in the current study voiced similar feelings regarding social stigma. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if they had anything else they would like to add about their experiences as nonresidential parents. Some nonresidential mothers ( $n = 6$ ) reported feeling alienated from their social



networks and judged by society for being a nonresidential mother, because nonresidential parenting is more commonly associated with fatherhood. Some nonresidential fathers ( $n = 4$ ), on the other hand, mentioned biases against fathers within the judicial system. Future research should explore additional communication challenges nonresidential parents experience outside of just those within their relationships with their children. This research would provide another lens from which to compare the experiences of nonresidential mothers and fathers.

**Impact of communication challenges.** Results of the present analysis indicate there is a relationship between the communication challenges these nonresidential parents experience and their ability to enact their parenting. For example, one way a nonresidential father might enact his parenting is through *keeping in touch*; however, if the residential parent refuses to answer his telephone calls or refuses to allow him to speak with his child when he calls, this nonresidential father is unable to enact *keeping in touch* behaviors as part of his parenting. This illustrates an important limitation these nonresidential parents may experience. Even if a nonresidential parent conceptualizes their role as that of an *active participant*, if the residential parent is acting as a gatekeeper, the nonresidential parent's ability to enact certain behaviors is limited. It is important to explore these communication challenges that nonresidential parents experience in order to contextualize the situational restraints under which they are attempting to parent.

For example, Malcolm reported *monitored communication* as one communication challenge he faces within this relationships with his daughters. He described a situation where his attempt at *physical well-being – involvement* created a serious problem. This

father asked his daughter during a Skype conversation about headaches she had been suffering from and whether or not her mother (the residential parent) had bought her glasses so that her headaches would cease. The residential mother was eavesdropping on this conversation and then used that interaction later in court to suit her own purposes. Malcolm now feels limited in his ability to communicate with his daughter, because the residential parent could continue to eavesdrop and use future interactions in court proceedings as well. While this father previously attempted to enact parenting through *physical well-being – involvement*, he feels he is no longer able to do so. An understanding of the communication challenges Malcolm experiences provides a more comprehensive picture of this parenting situation. It is not that he does not want to be involved in the physical well-being of his daughters. Rather, he feels he is unable to be involved in this aspect of their life, due to his ex-wife monitoring his interactions with them.

### **Connections between RQs and Categories**

These results suggest a framework for understanding how nonresidential parents conceptualize their parenting roles and how they enact those roles through parenting behaviors, while taking into account various communication challenges they might experience within their relationships with their children. First, parents identified their parental role or roles. For example, one commonly reported nonresidential parent role mentioned in this study was *active participant – general*. If a nonresidential parent identified this as one of their primary parental responsibilities, the next step would seem to be the enactment of this role through actual parenting behavior. Throughout the rest of

the Discussion section, *Ns* in parentheses refer to number of parents represented in that category (i.e., out of 40).

**Active participant – general role and parenting behaviors.** Results of the present study indicate the identification of *active participant – general* as a parental role was commonly connected to four specific methods of enacting parenting: *spending time together*, *keeping in touch*, *school involvement*, and *physical well-being – involvement* (see Figure 1). Thirteen participants (one-third of the sample) identified *active participant – general* as part of their parent role. Many participants who identified *active participant – general* as one of their parental roles also noted enacting parenting through *spending time together* and *keeping in touch*, and some of them noted *school involvement* and *physical well-being – involvement*. This pattern indicates that many participants who identified *active participant – general* as one of their parental roles also reported enacting parenting through behaviors that allowed them to stay actively involved in their nonresidential children’s lives. These parents’ role conceptualizations are consistent with the way in which they report enacting their parenting.

For example, the connection between *active participant – general* and parenting behaviors is evident within Terrance’s description of his parental role and how he reported enacting parenting. First, Terrance described his nonresidential parenting role as “continuing the relationship with them.” This is an example of the *active participant – general* category. Then he went on to describe enacting parenting through *keeping in touch* and *spending time together*. According to Terrance, he speaks with his children regularly on the telephone: “I make sure I talk to them every day on the phone.” For Terrance the telephone is his primary means of communicating with his children because

he lives just under 1,000 miles from his children. For this reason, when he does travel to visit his children he emphasized *spending time together* with them. According to Terrance, he spent time with them “from the time they got home from school until the time they went to bed. It was not just a few hours.” He went on to list a variety of activities he engages in with his children when they are physically together including going to the park and playing games. Terrance is an example of the connection between *active participant – general* and parenting behaviors because he identified *active participant – general* as his parental role and then went on to give examples of how he enacts this role in his parenting.

Similarly, Mary identified one of her parental roles as *active participant – general* and then went on to emphasize the importance of being involved with her two-year-old daughter’s healthcare (*physical well-being – involvement*). When talking about her parental role, Mary said one of the most important roles of a nonresidential parent is “devoting your time.” She then went on to talk about her involvement with her daughter’s healthcare. According to Mary, “I take her to her doctor’s appointments; get her antibiotics filled, and all those kinds of things.” For this mother, one of the primary ways she participates in her daughter’s life is by taking care of her health and well-being.

The connections between *active participant – general* and these parenting behaviors provide evidence of the types of behaviors these parents employ in order to be active participants in their children’s lives. These results suggest that the primary ways these parents remain involved is through *spending time together, keeping in touch, school involvement, and physical well-being – involvement*. Interestingly, only two participants identified *active participant – general* as part of their parental role and reported *extra-*

*curricular involvement* as a parenting strategy. *Extra-curricular involvement* was not a primary method these parents employed to stay actively involved in their children's lives; they were more interested in maintaining involvement through a variety of other means.

**Active participant – education role and parenting behaviors.** Similarly, an association between *active participant – education* and *school involvement* also emerged (see Figure 2). Seven out of the nine participants who identified *active participant – education* as part of their parental role also reported engaging in *school involvement* behaviors. These results illustrate participants who believed part of their parental role was to maintain involvement in their children's education, also reported being involved in their children's education. For example, Richard claimed one of his parental roles was being involved with his son's education (*active participant – education*). According to Richard, his role is to “assist him with his homework and make sure his homework is done every night.” Richard then went on to give examples of how he does this:

There is one time, I think it was last March, a week or two before his term ended. His teacher wrote a note to my ex and to me saying that there were a certain number of homework assignments that he hadn't finished – very, very rare. I said, “you've got to buckle down and finish this weekend.” He started with about half of his free time on Friday night and his free time on Saturday, and it was mostly done by the time Sunday came around.

Richard has visitation with his son every other weekend. On these weekends, his son comes and stays at his home on Friday and Saturday nights. Here Richard is giving an example of a time when he participated in his son's education by insisting that he complete his missed work during his visitation time. Richard was very adamant that his

son complete his assignments, and clearly described how he participated in making sure that happened (*school involvement*). This is an example of how, for some parents, their reports of *active participant – education* transitioned into their own reports of how they stay involved with their children’s education through *school involvement*.

While a connection was evident between *active participant – education* and *school involvement*, a similar connection did *not* emerge between participants who described *active participant – education* as part of their parental role and participants who identified *extra-curricular involvement* as one of their parental behaviors. Only two participants out of ten that reported *extra-curricular involvement* as one of their parenting behaviors also identified *active participant – education* as one of their parental roles. A potential explanation for these results is that, for this sample, participation in children’s recreational school activities were considered separate and different from participation in children’s educational experiences.

**Teacher role and parenting behaviors.** Results indicated that two-thirds of the participants who reported *teaching* as one of the methods they use to enact their parenting also identified *teacher* as one of their parental roles (see Figure 3). These parents identified part of their parental role is to be a *teacher*, and then described their own parenting behaviors that illustrated how they enact this role by *teaching* their children morals and values, as well as *teaching* them to be independent. For example, Damon described the role of the nonresidential parent as “guiding your child through life to the point where they can go through life on their own without you,” and then went on to describe how he achieves this with his own parenting behaviors. According to Damon,

They [children] understand that “hey we live here too. We are the ones that are helping make the mess. We should help clean the mess too.” So I am making sure that they are responsible for their things. They are responsible for making sure their rooms are clean. We [self and wife] do not go in there when they are not here, things like that. So they have the responsibility of making sure that it stays clean, tidy, and all that kind of stuff, because in the future they are going to have to do that too.

First, Damon identified that one of his parental roles is to teach his children to be functioning adults. He then went on to give an example of how he does this; he insists that his children do chores when they are at his house so that they learn to do these things for themselves. This illustrates another area where role conceptualizations were consistent with the way in which respondents reported enacting parenting. These parents identified with the *teacher* role and then reported *teaching* as one of their parenting behaviors.

**Provider – tangible role and parenting behaviors.** Results indicated the identification of the *provider – tangible* role was connected with the *providing – tangible* parenting behavior (see Figure 4). Fifteen participants included *provider – tangible* within their conceptualization of the nonresidential parenting role, and 40% of those respondents also described *providing – tangible* as one of their parenting behaviors. For instance, Jeremy noted that one of his roles (*provider – tangible*) was to pay child support, and then reported paying child support (*providing – tangible*) as one of the ways he enacted parenting. While it might be surprising that relatively few of the respondents who identified the *provider – tangible* actually described providing for their children, it is

still important to note that the role conceptualization and role enactment were consistent for this 40% of respondents.

Another connection emerged between the *provider – tangible* role and a different parenting behavior: 80% of the participants who identified with the *provider – tangible* role reported enacting their parenting through *spending time together* ( $n = 12$ ). While these parents stressed the importance of the *provider – tangible* role, their parenting behaviors do not necessarily fit within that conceptualization. Instead of emphasizing *providing – tangible*, these parents are *spending time together* with their children. Perhaps these parents see themselves as providing recreational and entertainment opportunities for their children. For example, Blaine included *provider – tangible* in his parental role conceptualization, but he did not report *providing – tangible* as one of his parenting behaviors. He did, however, describe enacting parenting through *spending time together* with his children: “she [residential mother] has very little money, so they do not really do anything or go anywhere. When I’m with them, I show them good times, that they otherwise would not have.” Perhaps Blaine views these activities and experiences as a way that he can provide for his children, since they are not afforded those opportunities when they are with their mother. While providing entertainment and recreation is certainly different from paying child support or buying children necessary items (i.e., clothing and food), this type of provision still requires monetary costs. Since these parents’ time with their children is inherently limited, perhaps providing *through* their time spent together these parents can still identify themselves as “providers” while at the same time spending time with their children.



**Nurturer role and parenting behaviors.** Results indicated the identification of the *nurturer* role was connected to a variety of parenting behaviors: *showing physical affection, keeping in touch, assurances, and supporting – emotional* (see Figure 5). Nineteen participants identified *nurturer* as part of their parental role. Some participants who identified their parental role as *nurturer*, also reported enacting parenting through *showing physical affection, keeping in touch, assurances, and supporting – emotional*. These results reflect the diversity of the actual parenting behaviors that might encapsulate the *nurturer* role. While some parents might engage in *keeping in touch* behaviors in order to nurture their children, other parents might select *supporting – emotional* as a means of enacting their nurturer role. While some parental roles, such as *provider*, may be related to a finite set of parenting behaviors (*providing – tangible*), *nurturer* is a less defined parental role that can include a variety of behaviors based on the preferences and perspectives of individual parents attempting to enact this role.

Meg described her parental role as “not like physical things, but more like mentally making sure my daughter is okay, that her environment is okay, and making sure she is happy, and that her relationship with her [residential] dad is okay.” Meg conceptualizes her parental role as that of *nurturer* as she believes it is her responsibility to make sure that her daughter feels loved and supported. When talking about her parenting behaviors, Meg reported the use of *assurances*: “I say to her, ‘I am always thinking about you.’” This statement functions to assure her daughter that her mother, while not physically present, still values their parent/child relationship. Meg is currently living in the United States while her daughter is living abroad. Because she and her daughter are so far apart, these *assurances* may be particularly important within this

relationship. Here Meg enacts her *nurturer* role through *assurances*. Meg also reported enacting parenting through *supporting – emotional*: “when I sense something, I just email her or text her, because then she can text me back.” The primary method of communication with her daughter is Skype, but her ex-husband (the residential parent) has a tendency to monitor their Skype conversations, which limits what her daughter can say to her during those interactions. In order to cope with this, when Meg senses there might be something going on with her daughter, she reaches out to her using email or text messages so she can still provide emotional support to her daughter when necessary. This example illustrates the connection that emerged between the *nurturer* role and enacting parenting through *assurances* and *supporting – emotional*.

Similarly, Candice also identified *nurturer* as one of her parental roles. According to Candice, a nonresidential parent is “someone who is responsible for nurturing and caring for their children.” However, when describing her parenting behaviors Candice did not report using *assurances*. Instead, Candice described *keeping in touch*. Candice said, “I call every 48 hours.” When asked about the content of these phone calls Candice said, “on the phone, it is about day-to-day stuff.” Perhaps it is through this *keeping in touch* behavior that Candice attempts to enact her *nurturing* role. Through these regular telephone calls in order to keep up-to-date about what is going on in her children’s lives, she could also be communicating her love, care, and commitment to them. This is an example of how parents identified with the *nurturer* role and then enacted their parenting through *keeping in touch*.

**Nurturer role and communication challenges.** Of the ten participants who experienced the challenge of *lack of intimate communication*, three of these individuals

also described *nurturer* as part of their parental role. It is important to note that these three parents did *not* report engaging in any of the four parenting behaviors associated with the *nurturer* role listed above, and did not report any other parenting behaviors in common. For example, Steven included *nurturer* within his conceptualization of his parental role and then went on to cite *lack of intimate communication* as a communication challenges he experiences within his relationships with one of his children. According to Steven:

because it has been such a long time of thing being like this, it's like... you are kind of distant from each other... it is hard to communicate with this child that you've literally spent hardly any time with no matter how much you love her.

Steven lives in a different state than his daughter and, for that reason, does not get to see her very often. Due to this lack of face-to-face contact, he does not feel that they know one another that well, and as a result, it is difficult to interact with her. He does not feel close with his daughter and their conversations lack intimacy. This example could illustrate the difficulty of enacting the *nurturer* role due to the challenge of *lack of intimate communication*. These results should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of participants that have both *nurturer* and *lack of intimate communication* in common, but this does suggest a relationship might exist between this challenge and the inability to engage in *nurturer* behaviors.

**Limited role and communication challenges.** Connections can also be drawn between the *limited role* category and a variety of communication challenges (see Figure 6). Twenty-two participants included a discussion of *limited role* within their parental role conceptualizations. Some of these respondents also reported the challenges of

*gatekeeping*, *stonewalling*, *limits of mediated communication*, *monitored communication*, and *defamation*. Taken together, these connections illustrate a variety of potential reasons why these parents identified the role of the nonresidential parent as limited. For example, Julie is currently living abroad while her nine-year-old son lives in the United States with his father. When describing her parental role Julie said:

I'm not really a parent anymore... I think as a mother you want to be able to help your children through things, when they're hurt, when they are sad, and when they're upset, and just being there for them, and I feel like I am not able to be. So I feel like I'm not really being a parent to him at all.

Julie identified that her parental role is limited because she is nonresidential mother, who do not live in close proximity to her son. While she would like to be a more involved parent, in reality her parental role is limited and she is not able to perform parenting the way that she believes she should be. For this reason she does not even consider herself to be a parent to her son anymore. Julie went on to describe *gatekeeping* as a communication challenge she experiences within her relationship with her son. According to Julie, "I do not have access to him [son]. My ex-husband cut me off about a year ago and I do not even know where he lives." Her ex-husband stopped communicating with her and for this reason she lost contact with her son. She would attempt to call her son on the telephone and no one would ever answer. Now a year has gone by without her being able to communicate with her son. In this situation, Julie is not able to enact parenting at all due to her ex-husband's *gatekeeping* behaviors. Denying her access to her son has made it impossible for her to parent. She listed various parenting responsibilities, such as helping their children when they are sad, that she would like to

be able to do, but cannot do due to her lack of access to her son. Perhaps if her ex-husband had not cut her off, she would be able to engage in some of these parenting behaviors, and might not have reported having such a limited role.

A connection also emerged between parents who identified *limited role* and experienced *stonewalling* as a communication challenge. For example, when talking about her parental role Leah said, “there is only so much you can do when you are this far away.” Leah lives within 30 miles of her children, but because she is a nonresidential parent she does not see them daily and feels that because she is a nonresidential mother her parental role is limited. Leah also reported *stonewalling* as a communication challenge: “my messages are not returned. My calls are not returned and the phone is not answered.” Perhaps another reason why Leah conceptualized her parental role as limited (besides the fact that she is a nonresidential parent) is because of her children’s refusal to communicate with her to the point where they have begun *stonewalling* her.

Other participants who reported *limited role* also described the *limits of mediated communication* as a communication challenge they experience. Kate also described her parental role as limited, and then discussed how challenging it can be for her to talk to her son on the phone:

He is hard to talk to on the phone. It is hard to grab his attention when he is on the phone, especially because of his surroundings, he would rather focus on that. So talking on the phone it is hard... he is very hard to talk to on the phone. Our conversations, honestly, don’t last too long on the phone because he gets to a point where he just wanders, and he just doesn’t want to be on the phone, and I can tell that.

Kate's son does not communicate well with her on the phone. He has ADHD and has a difficult time concentrating. Kate lives within 550 miles of her son and only sees him on the weekends; therefore, Kate might feel her role is limited in part due to the challenges of communicating with her son using the telephone, considering she is not able to be physically present on a daily basis. These parents reported experiencing a variety of challenges that impede their ability to communicate with their children. It might be that because their parent/child interactions are limited, they also identified their parental role as limited.

**Co-parenting and gatekeeping.** The move from role conceptualization to parenting enactment is not always simple. As was evident within this study, many times nonresidential parents experienced communication challenges that prevented them from enacting parenting. For example, an interesting relationship emerged between the *co-parent* role, *co-parenting* as a parenting behavior, and *gatekeeping* (see Figure 7). Eight participants included *co-parent* in their parental role conceptualizations, while a total of five participants described *co-parenting* behaviors as one method they use to enact parenting. One would assume that participants who identified *co-parent* as one of their roles would have also described engaging in *co-parenting* behaviors; however, that association did not emerge within this data. Only one of the participants that identified *co-parent* as part of their parental roles actually described engaging in *co-parenting*. This lack of association can be further explained by *gatekeeping*. Seven of the eight respondents who included *co-parent* in their role conceptualizations also reported experiencing *gatekeeping*. For example, according to Ryan the role of the nonresidential parent is “to communicate with the residential parent. I think that is huge. I think

communication is a huge one.” Ryan then went on to describe *gatekeeping* as a communication challenge he experiences:

I didn't know this until probably one and a half years after we had gotten divorced. The first three months that we were separated, he [son] refused to eat and would hardly sleep. He went through a really bad bout of depression for about three or four months. I had no idea that he went through that until a year and a half after the divorce. I wish I knew that. I wish she [residential parent] would have communicated that to me, because I would've been able to do something or say something.

Ryan's son suffered from depression after the divorce and Ryan did not know anything about these struggles. Ryan felt strongly that he would have wanted to be involved in helping his son overcome these issues, but he was not able to because the residential parent never informed him of their son's problem.

The relationship between *co-parenting* and *gatekeeping* may indicate that while these parents believe co-parenting is optimal, they are not actually able to engage in these behaviors due to their inability to parent together with the residential parents of their children. Co-parenting is contingent upon both parents' willingness to work with one another and parent their children together. If the residential parent is not willing to co-parent, then co-parenting is no longer an option available to these nonresidential parents. If these residential parents are enacting *gatekeeping* behaviors in order to control and limit the nonresidential parents' access to their children, it may be likely that they are also unwilling to co-parent with these participants, as was the case with Ryan and his ex-wife. This connection also suggests that respondents' role conceptualizations do not necessarily

translate into their parenting behaviors, due to various communication challenges that may create barriers to their parenting, and therefore some of these role conceptualizations might more accurately reflect these parents' ideal parental roles and not always the roles they are actually able to perform. These results illustrate the importance of considering the communication challenges nonresidential parents experience when examining their relationships with their children.

**Assurances and physical affection.** A connection also emerged within the categories of RQ2 data. Eight participants reported both *assurances* and *showing physical affection* (see Figure 8). Perhaps these results illustrate the cyclical nature of nonresidential parenting. When these parents are physically present with their children, they are able to communicate closeness through physical affection, but when these parents are separated from their children they must resort to other strategies to communicate closeness and to reassure their children that they love and care for them. As with Phoebe's example reported earlier, she reported giving her son hugs when they are together, but also described *assurances* as a means of communicating closeness and affection when she is not physically with her son: "on Facebook I tell him I love him, and I will see him on whatever day that I am supposed to get him, or do like in Facebook they have the smiley faces or the smooch face." Here Phoebe is highlighting the connection between *showing physical affection* and *assurances*. The first is a parenting behavior that can only be used when parent and child are together, and the latter is a relational maintenance strategy that can be used when parent and child are not physically together to communicate closeness and affection.



**Keeping in touch and communication challenges.** Results indicated that respondents who reported *keeping in touch* as a method for enacting parenting also experienced a wide variety of communication challenges: *gatekeeping*, *limits of mediated communication*, and *difficult topics – general* (see Figure 9). These results illustrate that even though participants experienced communication challenges within their relationships with their children, some of these parents were still able to parent, albeit at times in more limited ways. For example, participants who were denied visitation by the residential parent (*gatekeeping*) could then attempt to parent by *keeping in touch* with their children. This is what Molly reported doing in order to maintain her relationships with her children despite her ex-husband’s *gatekeeping* behavior. According to Molly, her ex-husband limited her visitation time with her children, especially during the holidays:

there were times when I really would’ve loved to strangle the man, because he would say I would get the kids for Christmas Day and they would show up at six o’clock at night as opposed to like, noon, which is what we have agreed upon.

Molly’s ex-husband would control her visitation time and often make promises regarding visitation and then not follow through on those plans. Molly also reported *keeping in touch* behaviors as means of coping with her ex-husband’s *gatekeeping* behaviors: “I got Facebook so I can keep tabs on what is going on with them and just try to talk with them as much as possible.” The *keeping in touch* category may illustrate one of the strategies participants used in attempt to cope with the various communication challenges that they experienced. While these behaviors are not perfect substitutes for residential parenting, as evidenced by the fact that these participants complained about the *limits of mediated*

*communication, keeping in touch* does provide these parents a means for attempting to maintain their parent/child connections and communicate to their children that even though they cannot be physically present, their connection to their children still exists.

**Gatekeeping and defamation.** Finally, a connection emerged between two communication challenges: *gatekeeping* and *not defaming the residential parent* (see Figure 10). Out of the six participants that identified *not defaming the residential parent* as a communication challenge, five of them also reported *gatekeeping* as another communication challenge they experience within their relationships with their children. For example, Jeremy reported *gatekeeping* as a communication challenge he experiences:

Unfortunately [ex-wife and residential parent] knows that that is the only way she can really hurt me, is by depriving me of my time with them [children], or my communication with them. There is nothing more that she can say or do that will really get me anymore. I've just come to that point of acceptance. So she does often times try to manipulate those situations. You know, "the kids don't want to talk to you." Or I'll text her and say, "will you please have the kids call me to say goodnight" and she'll say, "oh they're too busy."

Jeremy's ex-wife limits his interactions with his children and controls how often he is able to communicate with them. Jeremy also discussed the challenge of *not defaming the residential parent*. According to Jeremy, "so I have to think things through sometimes, because things could be construed as negative, speaking ill of her, and I don't want to do that." Jeremy has to monitor himself and consider what he says about his ex-wife in front of his children, in order to keep himself from defaming her in front of them.

All but one participant, who struggles with *not defaming the residential parent* to their children, also have residential parents who limit their access to their children. Perhaps these parents have a desire to defame the residential parent, at least in part, because of their *gatekeeping* behaviors. The *gatekeeping* creates a barrier for these nonresidential parents to communicate with their children and can result in the development of resentment towards the residential parent, resentment that they feel they are not able to express because speaking negatively about the residential parent (no matter how good it might feel in the moment) might be detrimental to their children.

The current study provides an initial, qualitative exploration of nonresidential parenting within the field of communication. These results suggest preliminary evidence of relationships between parental role conceptualizations, parenting behaviors, and communication challenges. Further, these findings extend the study of family communication to examine the interpersonal communication that occurs within nonresidential parent/child relationships.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

A few limitations of this investigation should be considered when interpreting the findings, although they also suggest potential fruitful areas for future research. First, only nonresidential parents were interviewed for this study. Scholars interested in furthering this area of research might collect dyadic data, from both nonresidential parents and their children, in order to explore the potential competing communication challenges parents and children experience within these relationships. Future researchers might also examine how these children conceptualize their roles as son/daughter and how they enact these roles within their relationships with their nonresidential and residential parents. For

example, Ryan described how his relationship with his son changed after the divorce. In the past, he and his son had a very close relationship but once the divorce occurred the son distanced himself from his father in order to remain neutral within the divorce.

Research on how children conceptualize their roles as son/daughter, especially in situations where they are son/daughter to a residential and nonresidential parents, would provide additional insight into how these children understand their position within these families, and how this position manifests itself within their communicative behaviors.

Second, due to the qualitative nature of this investigation and the small sample size, these results are not generalizable to a larger population of nonresidential parents. Rather, these results provide a rich and detailed description of the nonresidential parenting experience from a communication perspective. Future research should begin to examine the associations between categories that were identified within this study by proposing quantitative tests of the associations described here. It is this quantitative research that will provide the opportunity to generalize to larger populations of nonresidential parents and, in so doing, will refine the theoretical observations outlined here.

### **Conclusion**

The present study addressed the need for communication-focused research on the nonresidential parent/child relationship from the perspective of nonresidential parents. Respondents identified eight roles, 11 types of parenting behaviors, and four primary communication challenges they experience within their relationships with their children. Taken together, these results indicate the complexities of being both a parent and nonresidential. These individuals want to be engaged in their children's lives, yet their

ability to parent is limited by their nonresidential status. These results also provide additional support for the microstructural perspective. Our society places an emphasis on sex differences; however, research has illustrated that men and women are more similar in terms of their communication than they are different (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Dindia & Canary, 2006). This study highlights the complexities of nonresidential parenting as more a product of these parents' nonresidential status than of their gender.

Two participants in the current study (both fathers) mentioned during the course of their interviews that death would be easier to cope with than being a nonresidential parent. According to Blaine, "I often find myself saying it would almost be better if either my children had died or I had died, because there would be closure, and instead it has been disaster filled with disappointment." Similarly, Malcolm said: "it is frustrating not being part of their lives, teaching them things that dads teach, that parents teach, not being there to see them grow. It's worse than if they would have died." This sentiment, while it was only voiced by two participants in this study, highlights how difficult it can be for parents to be nonresidential, and should function as a call for communication scholars to continue to explore these parent/child relationships. Many of these parents are struggling to figure out how to parent, and how to maintain their relationships with their children. Interpersonal communication scholarship can explore the experiences of these parents and give voice to the nonresidential parenting experience. This scholarship could also inform practitioners who work with these parents and provide them with sound advice for how to negotiate their relationships with their children.

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Table 1

*Participant Demographic Information*

Part. #	Pseudonym	# NRC	Time as NRP	Age of NRC (in years)	Distance from NRC	# RC
1	Logan	1	4 mo.	3	Within 30 miles	0
2	Richard	1	3 yrs.	9	Within 30 miles	0
3	Veronica	2	3.5 yrs.	7, 7	Within 1,500 miles	0
4	Kate	1	6 yrs.	12	Within 550 miles	3
5	Lanie	2	6 yrs.	7, 13	Within 30 miles	1
6	Stana	1	5 yrs.	12	Within 1,500 miles	0
7	Jared	1	4 yrs.	16	Within 1,400 miles	3
8	Meg	1	6 mo.	14	NRC abroad	1
9	Quinn	2	2 yrs.	6, 12	Within 800 miles	0
10	Nathan	2	8 yrs.	13, 19	Within 300 miles	0
11	Leah	2	10 yrs.	13, 19	Within 30 miles	0
12	Mary	1	1.5 yrs.	2	Within 15 miles	0
13	Caroline	2	6 yrs.	15, 20	Within 100 miles	3
14	Arielle	3	6 yrs.	10, 17, 19	Within 300 miles	0
15	Dean	1	4 yrs.	5	Within 30 miles	0
16	Elena	2	19 yrs.	22, 24	Within 30 miles	1
17	Damon	2	3 yrs.	12, 15	Within 150 miles	0
18	Jeremy	2	6 yrs.	10, 11	Within 15 miles	0
19	Blaine	2	3 yrs.	8, 9	Within 2,600 miles	0
20	Ryan	2	3 yrs.	12, 14	Within 30 miles	0
21	Kristen	1	3 yrs.	8	Within 15 miles	0
22	Samuel	2	11 yrs.	18, 19	Within 15 miles	0
23	Javier	3	1.5 yrs.	6, 12, 14	Within 15 miles	0
24	Tyler	1	2 yrs.	2	Within 15 miles	0
25	Candice	2	8 yrs.	14, 17	Within 30 miles	1
26	Phoebe	1	6 yrs.	12	Within 150 miles	0
27	Julie	1	2 yrs.	9	Within 1,400 miles	2
28	Molly	4	10 yrs.	20, 23, 24, 27	Within 150 miles	0
29	Alan	1	1.5 yrs.	5	Within 1,400 miles	0
30	Gina	1	2 yrs.	16	Within 15 miles	1
31	Emily	1	5 yrs.	8	Within 15 miles	0

32	Terrance	2	12 yrs.	20, 22	Within 1,000 miles	1
33	Xander	1	2 yrs.	5, 7	Within 300 miles	0
34	Malcolm	2	2 yrs.	12, 14	Within 800 miles	1
35	Doug	3	9 mo.	2, 2, 9	Within 15 miles	0
36	Phil	3	1.5 yrs.	11, 13, 17	Within 30 miles	0
37	Steven	3	4 yrs.	12, 18, 19	Within 1,400 miles	0
38	Edward	2	2 yrs.	13, 14	Within 30 miles	0
39	Jasmine	1	5 yrs.	15	Within 15 miles	1
40	Cordelia	2	16 yrs.	17, 19	Within 30 miles	0

Note: NRC refers to nonresidential children; NRP refers to nonresidential parents; RC refers to residential children.

Table 2

<i>Role of the Nonresidential Parent</i> (N = 130)		
<b>Parental Role</b>	<b># of participants</b>	<b># of messages</b>
<b>1. Limited Role</b>	<b>n = 22</b>	<b>n = 32</b>
<i>“I do not get to do any of the traditional regular things, like have them do their homework, or make sure they take their bath, or things like that. I have to do that one time [on visitation weekends]. It’s not an everyday thing.” (Tyler)</i>		
<b>2. Active Participant</b>	<b>n = 22</b>	<b>n = 28</b>
a. Active Participant – General	n = 13	n = 15
<i>“You need to spend as much time as possible and as physically allowable with them.” (Caroline)</i>		
b. Active Participant – Education	n = 9	n = 13
<i>“Making sure that they are getting an education.” (Kate)</i>		
<b>3. Nurturer</b>	<b>n = 19</b>	<b>n = 20</b>
<i>“Emotional support.” (Steven)</i>		
<b>4. Provider – Tangible</b>	<b>n = 15</b>	<b>n = 17</b>
<i>“Making sure that they [children] are provided for financially.” (Emily)</i>		
<b>5. Teacher</b>	<b>n = 13</b>	<b>n = 14</b>
<i>“Being someone who sets boundaries for their kids and teaches them right from wrong.” (Blaine)</i>		
<b>6. Sole Parent</b>	<b>n = 5</b>	<b>n = 9</b>
<i>“When you have both parents there, sometimes when you’re not into it, or having a rough day or whatever, the other person if there. Now, like if I had a rough day, I still got to deal with him [son] when I have him.” (Logan)</i>		
<b>7. Co-parent</b>	<b>n = 8</b>	<b>n = 8</b>
<i>“Support the residential parent’s position” (Elena)</i>		
<b>8. Disciplinarian</b>	<b>n = 2</b>	<b>n = 2</b>

*“Deal out punishment” (Phil)*

Table 3

<i>Enacting Parenting as a Nonresidential Parent</i>		
		(N = 176)
<b>Parental Enactment</b>	<b># of participants</b>	<b># of messages</b>
<b>1. School Involvement</b>	<b>n = 31</b>	<b>n = 37</b>
a. School Involvement – General	n = 21	n = 24
	<i>“When they have projects or homework over the weekend I always helped them with that.” (Xander)</i>	
b. Extra-Curricular Involvement	n = 10	n = 13
	<i>“I make it a point to be at their school functions.” (Jeremy)</i>	
<b>2. Spending Time Together</b>	<b>n = 28</b>	<b>n = 28</b>
	<i>“Every weekend has to be full of activity, whether it’s going to the zoo or my parents’ house, sometimes will go visit them on the weekend... So, typically we try to do something interactive with them so they are not just sitting around the house watching TV.” (Lanie)</i>	
<b>3. Keeping in Touch</b>	<b>n = 16</b>	<b>n = 23</b>
	<i>“I usually try calling every other day to find out what is going on with him [son] and let him know that I am there.” (Phoebe)</i>	
<b>4. Assurances</b>	<b>n = 15</b>	<b>n = 19</b>
	<i>“I say to her, ‘I am always thinking about you.’” (Meg)</i>	
<b>5. Providing – Tangible</b>	<b>n = 13</b>	<b>n = 18</b>
	<i>“I pay child support and buy what the kids need.” (Javier)</i>	
<b>6. Showing Physical Affection</b>	<b>n = 14</b>	<b>n = 15</b>
	<i>“Hugging and kissing... a lot of cuddling. Particularly before bedtime, they want to cuddle.” (Doug)</i>	
<b>7. Supporting – Emotional</b>	<b>n = 10</b>	<b>n = 12</b>
	<i>“When she tweets or something like that that she is upset, I will start a conversation with her and I’ll be like ‘hey what’s going on,’ that kind of thing. We send text messages.” (Lanie)</i>	

**8. Disciplining** *n* = 7 *n* = 7

*“As far as them listening, sometimes I have to be more stringent than normal to get my point across. They are used to the rules for when they are with their mother, and how things are done that way, and they do not always want things how I want them.” (Phil)*

**9. Teaching** *n* = 6 *n* = 6

*“I love my children, but I see a lot of his [ex-husband and residential father] traits and selfishness [in them] and it’s disheartening... The best I can do is show them the right way when they are with me.” (Leah)*

**10. Physical Well-Being – Involvement** *n* = 3 *n* = 6

*“I take her to her doctor’s appointments, get her antibiotics filled.” (Mary)*

**11. Co-parenting** *n* = 5 *n* = 5

*“I try to keep consistency between both houses. Unless it’s something that I just, I totally disagree with, then I can’t do it, but other than that we try to keep consistency.” (Arielle)*

Table 4

<i>Communication Challenges for Nonresidential Parents</i>		
(N = 106)		
<b>Communication Challenges</b>	<b># of participants</b>	<b># of messages</b>
<b>1. Residential Parent</b>	<b>n = 36</b>	<b>n = 52</b>
a. Gatekeeping	n = 24	n = 37
<i>“I am not allowed to call.” (Kristen)</i>		
b. Monitored Communication	n = 6	n = 8
<i>“A lot of times I feel that our conversations are monitored, and so I can’t really talk freely when I call.” (Quinn)</i>		
c. Defamation	n = 6	n = 7
<i>“My son has said things like, ‘well, mom you have to take care of me.’ And to me, that is something his dad said to him like, ‘your mom does not take care of you.’ Just little things like that, where he [residential father] might have said something.” (Emily)</i>		
<b>2. Difficult Topics</b>	<b>n = 18</b>	<b>n = 20</b>
a. Not Defaming the Residential Parent	n = 10	n = 10
<i>“I think the hardest thing for me to talk about with them [children] is [residential mother]. I have never said bad things about their mother to them. I have never talked down about her, or said the things I really feel about her to them, because I know that she is their mother.” (Blaine)</i>		
b. Difficult Topics – General	n = 8	n = 10
<i>“When it becomes uncomfortable is when there are situations where I cannot provide something, attend an event, or something that they require or that they need and I just cannot, and so that is where it becomes uncomfortable – trying to explain why I cannot.” (Xander)</i>		
<b>3. Children’s Refusal to Communicate</b>	<b>n = 16</b>	<b>n = 19</b>
a. Lack of Intimate Communication	n = 10	n = 13
<i>“[Son] called me out of the blue. I was so excited, because my son never calls me out of the blue. There’s always this ‘oh, I need \$50 for this.’ There is always an</i>		

*ending where there is 'I need some money.' So I told him about that, and I said, 'you know [son], it's just, it's sad because I feel like every time you call me, even though you preface it talking about all this stuff, you come back and say I need money.' So he called me a couple weeks ago and said 'here's was going on in school, here's what's happening with my games.' The last time we talked he said, 'you said every time I call you, I want money and that really bothers me' and I said 'well, it is true. I mean I can point out all these conversations. The last conversation we had you called to thank me for the Christmas present and then you told me you had other things on your list for Christmas, and I told you that was all you get.' So anyway, it went downhill from there. He said some really horrible things, the stepmom is more of a mother to him than I am. Dad is doing everything and I'm doing nothing, and it's just it was just ugly. It was very hurtful and very ugly... I was at the grocery store yesterday picking out a birthday card for him. What birthday card do you find for someone who doesn't even want to speak to you? I want to send him something, but there are cards that say 'you know I was going to buy you a car but,' well, that's in poor taste because he's mad at me because I can't give him \$3,000 for car. I mean I cannot even pick out a birthday card without feeling like I am offending him or being smart." (Leah)*

b. Stonewalling

*n* = 6

*n* = 6

*"I spoke to her in text about a week and a half ago. She told me, excuse my language, to 'fucking leave her alone – to go away.'" (Cordelia)*

#### **4. Limits of Mediated Communication**

*n* = 9

*n* = 15

*"If they [children] are having an issue with school, whether it be with adversity with a friend, or if it's homework, or whatever, it's hard to phone hug someone, or tell someone 'it's gonna be okay.' I don't know what goes on in the house over there, as far as what he has, or has not done for them. So I tend to feel, not disconnected, but that I just can't do much." (Lanie)*



## Appendix

### *Interview Protocol*

*Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. Today we will be talking about your experiences as a nonresidential parent including the challenges you have faced, and your experiences communicating with your child(ren). Do you have any questions?*

*This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed for future analysis. Only the two members of the research team will have access to the tape and transcription of the tape. Do you have any questions? [Once you have answered their questions, have them sign the IRB consent form if you are face-to-face.]*

*The interview should take between 45 and 60 minutes. The interview is broken up into three parts. We will begin with part one, which is comprised of basic demographic questions about yourself as well as some questions about how many children you have in order to set the scene for the rest of our conversation. Do you have any questions? [Answer any questions the participant has.]*

*I am going to turn on the audio-recorder and we will get started. [If conducting the interview over the telephone or Skype, after you get permission to turn on the recorder get verbal consent to be audio-recorded and participate in the interview – also make sure you have coordinated the receipt of the signed consent form.]*

*Part One – Demographic and Contextual information*

1. What is your age?
2. How would you describe your racial/ethnic identity?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is the highest level of education you have obtained?
5. What is your occupation?
6. Do you currently work full-time or part-time?
7. What is your annual income?
8. What state do you currently reside in?
9. In general, how would you describe what it means to be a parent?
  - Probe: What are the common responsibilities involved in being a parent?
  - Probe: Responsibilities of “mother” and “father.”
10. How many children do you have?
  - Probe: Sex and age of each child.
  - Probe: Where do each of your children live? (Who is the residential caregiver?  
and Do any of the children live predominately with the participant?)
  - Probe: Do you have any stepchildren? If so, where do they reside?
11. How long have you lived apart from your child(ren)?
12. Please tell me how you came to be a nonresidential parent.
  - Probe: Would you consider it your choice to have become a nonresidential  
parent? Please explain.
13. How satisfied have you been with your experiences as a nonresidential parent?

*Thank you. Now we will begin the second section of the interview. I am going to ask you some general questions about parenting and the responsibilities of parents.*

*Part Two – The role of the nonresidential parent*

14. Describe what it was like to be a residential parent.
15. How has being a parent changed since you became nonresidential?
16. How has being a parent stayed the same since you became nonresidential?
17. What are the primary responsibilities of a residential parent?
18. What are the primary responsibilities of a nonresidential parent?
19. How do you feel about transitioning from being a residential parent to a nonresidential parent?

Probe: What has this experience been like for you (uncertain, difficult, easy, stressful)?

*Thank you. Now we are going to move into the third section of the interview which will focus on your relationship with your child(ren).*

*Part Three – Frequency of interactions with child(ren)*

20. On average, how frequently would you say you communicate with your child(ren)?  
(daily, multiple times a week, every few months)
21. How satisfied are you with how frequently you interact with your child(ren)? Please explain.

22. What is the primary mode of communication you use to interact with your child(ren)?  
(telephone, text, face-to-face, etc.)

23. What other modes of communication do you use to interact with your child(ren)?

Probe: Please estimate the percentage that you use each of these modes. (50% face-to-face, 20% email, 20% phone calls, 10% Skype)

24. Do you have a visitation schedule?

Probe: If so, please describe your visitation schedule.

Probe: Does this reflect your legal arrangement or is this a more informal arrangement?

Probe: If the formal and informal agreements are different, how has your informal agreement developed?

25. How do you feel about your visitation schedule?

26. Describe what a typical month is like in terms of how often you see and talk to your child(ren).

*Part Four – Relationship quality*

27. Describe the level of control you feel you have in your child(ren)'s life/lives.

Probe: Control over decision making?

Probe: Control over discipline?

Probe: Control over education?

28. Are you satisfied with your level of parental control? Why or why not?

Probe: Has your level of control changed since you have become nonresidential?

If so, please explain.

29. Describe how involved you feel you are in your child(ren)'s life/lives.

Probe: Knowing where they are?

Probe: Knowing their friends?

Probe: Access to information about the child(ren)'s life/lives?

Probe: How has this level of involvement changed since you become nonresidential?

30. Are you satisfied with your level of involvement in your child(ren)'s life/lives? Why or why not?

31. What sorts of things do you talk about with your child(ren)?

Probe: Child(ren)'s relationship with their residential parent?

Probe: Child(ren)'s experiences at school?

Probe: Child(ren)'s extra-curricular activities/hobbies?

32. Do you find it difficult to talk your child(ren) about certain topics?

Probe: If so, what are those topics?

Probe: Why do you think these topics pose a challenge? (child's age?)

Probe: How do you attempt to cope with these challenges? (don't discuss them, editing, etc.)

Probe: Was communicating about these topics always difficult (when you were residential)?

Probe: Are there any topics that used to be challenging, but are not anymore? If so, what are they? Why do you think they no longer pose a challenge?

33. In as much detail as possible, describe a typical visit with your child(ren).

Probe: Routines?

Probe: What types of things do you do when you are together?

Probe: What topics do you usually discuss?

34. How do you communicate closeness or affection with your child(ren)?

Probe: Physical affection?

Probe: Routine sayings?

Probe: Use of technology to communicate closeness?

35. Do you find it challenging to communicate closeness or affection with your child(ren)? Why or why not?

36. Do you express closeness differently with your child(ren) now than you did when you were residential? If so, how?

Probe: Does being a nonresidential parent pose challenges for you in communicating closeness and affection with your children? If so, please explain.

37. How has being a nonresidential parent impacted your relationship with your child(ren)?

Probe: Do you feel any aspects of your relationship are more positive now that you are a nonresidential parent? If so, please explain.

38. Are there any other experiences related to being a nonresidential parent that we have not discussed that you would like to talk about?

*Thank you.*

Figure 1. Connections between *active participant – general* and various parenting behaviors. *Ns* in the boxes represent the number of parents in the category and *Ns* corresponding to the arrows represent the number of parents who reported both categories.

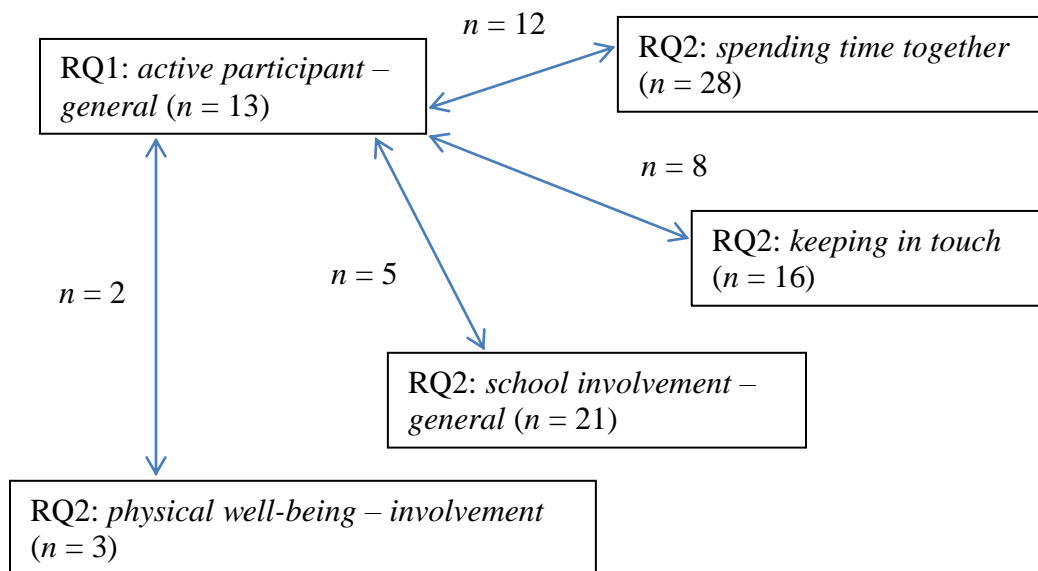
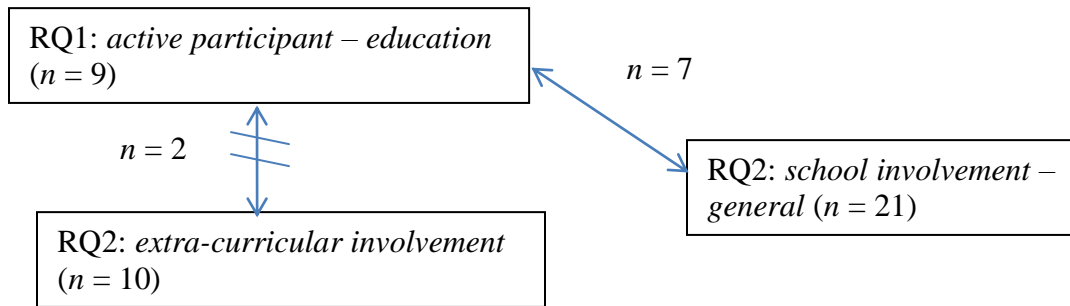


Figure 2. Connections between the identification of *active participant – education* and parenting behaviors. *Ns* in the boxes represent the number of parents in the category and *Ns* corresponding to the arrows represent the number of parents who reported both categories.





*Figure 3.* Connection between the identification of *teacher* as a parenting role and the description of *teaching* as a method for enacting parenting. *Ns* in the boxes represent the number of parents in the category and *Ns* corresponding to the arrows represent the number of parents who reported both categories.

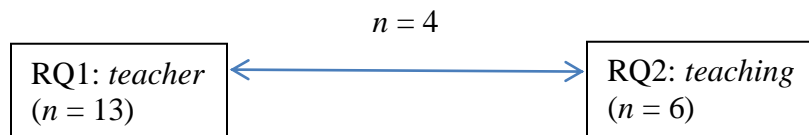


Figure 4. Connections between *provider – tangible* and parenting behaviors. *Ns* in the boxes represent the number of parents in the category and *Ns* corresponding to the arrows represent the number of parents who reported both categories.

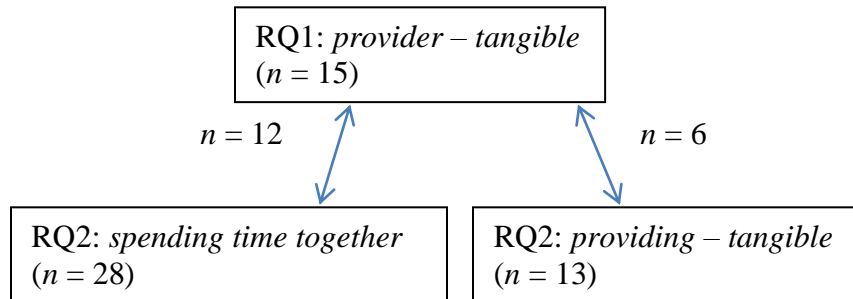


Figure 5. Connections between *nurturer*, parenting behaviors, and communication challenges. *Ns* in the boxes represent the number of parents in the category and *Ns* corresponding to the arrows represent the number of parents who reported both categories.

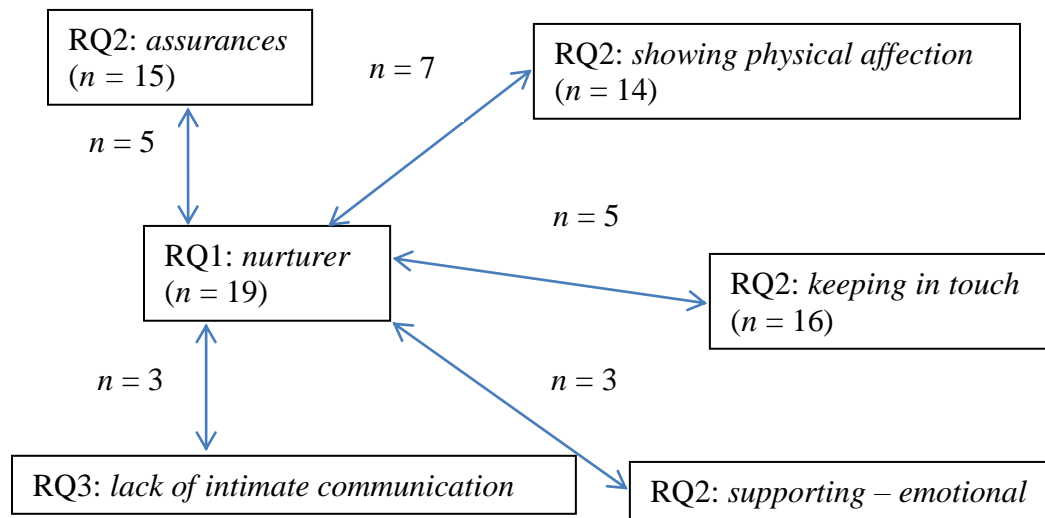


Figure 6. Connections between the identification of *limited role* and various communication challenges. *Ns* in the boxes represent the number of parents in the category and *Ns* corresponding to the arrows represent the number of parents who reported both categories.

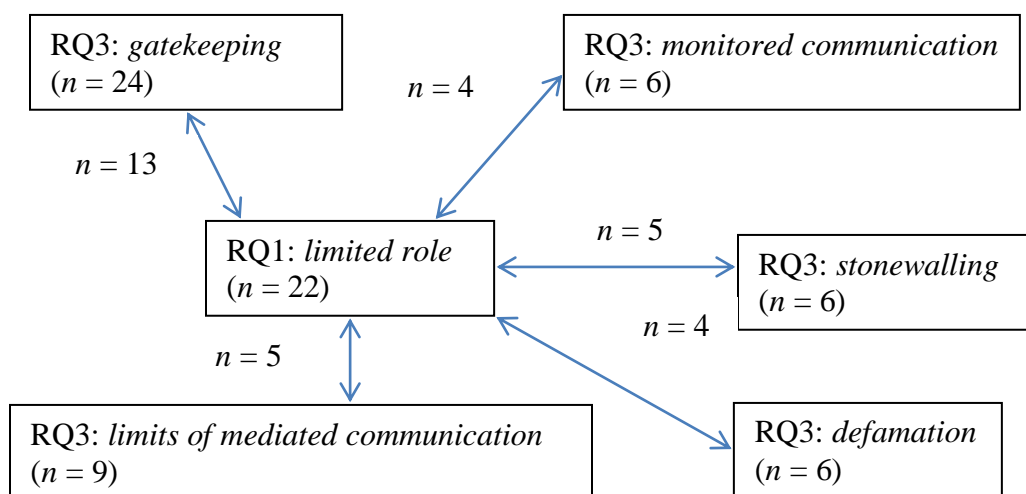


Figure 7. Connections and lack of connections between *co-parent*, communication challenges, and parenting behavior. *Ns* in the boxes represent the number of parents in the category and *Ns* corresponding to the arrows represent the number of parents who reported both categories.

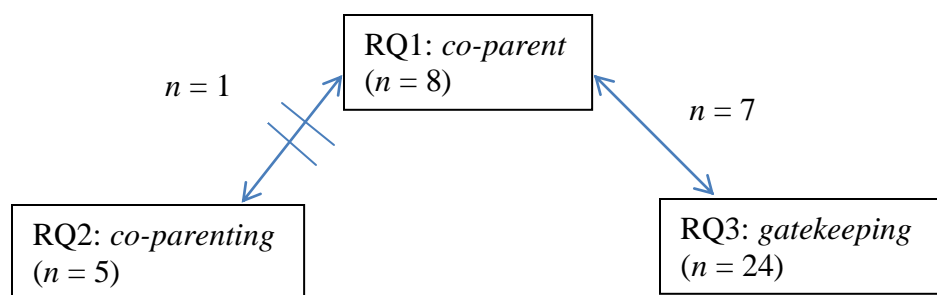


Figure 8. Connection between *assurances* and *showing physical affection*. *Ns* in the boxes represent the number of parents in the category and *Ns* corresponding to the arrows represent the number of parents who reported both categories.

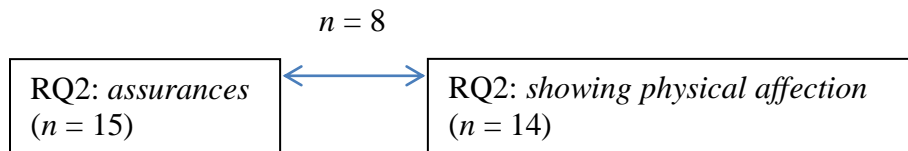


Figure 9. Connections between *keeping in touch* and various communication challenges. *Ns* in the boxes represent the number of parents in the category and *Ns* corresponding to the arrows represent the number of parents who reported both categories.

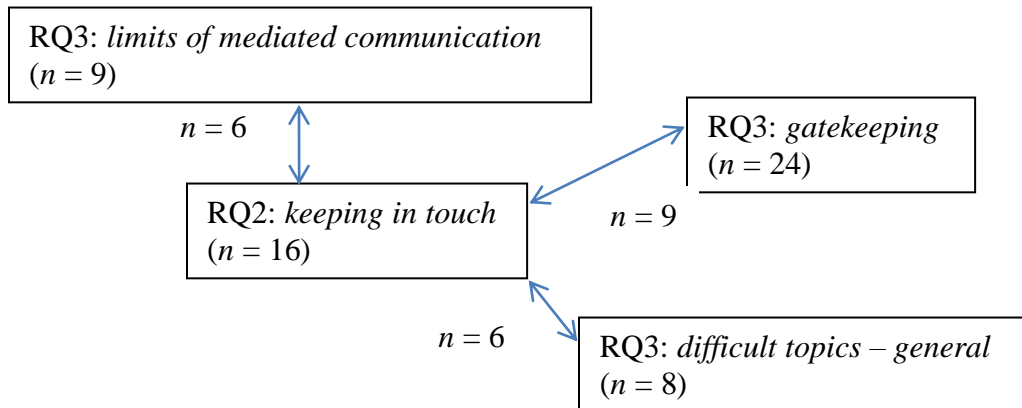
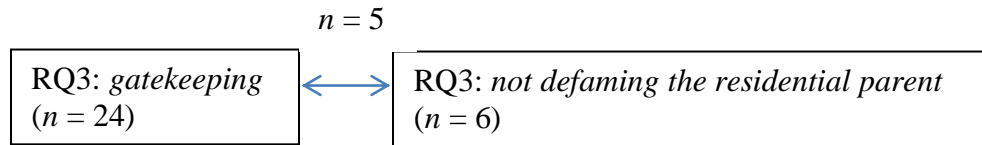


Figure 10. Connection between *gatekeeping* and *not defaming the residential parent*. *Ns* in the boxes represent the number of parents in the category and *Ns* corresponding to the arrows represent the number of parents who reported both categories.





## Falon Kartch

### Education

**Doctor of Philosophy**, May 2013, Interpersonal Communication  
**University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee**, Department of Communication  
 Dissertation: *Nonresidential Parenting: Parental Roles and Parent/Child Relationships*  
 Advisor: Dr. Lindsay Timmerman  
 Relevant Coursework: Interpersonal Communication; Marital/Family Communication; Understudied Close Relationships; Dark Side of Close Relationships; Conflict  
 Methodological Expertise: Qualitative Interviewing; Focus Groups; Ethnography; Discourse Analysis; Rhetorical Criticism

**Master of Arts**, May 2009, Communication Theory  
**Northern Illinois University**, Department of Communication  
 Thesis: *An Ethnographic Examination of Gossip in a Small Organization: Coalitions and Conflict Escalation*  
 Advisor: Dr. Kathleen Valde  
 Relevant Coursework: Interpersonal Communication; Conflict; Ethnography; Qualitative Methods; Quantitative Methods; Organizational Communication; Persuasion; Gender and Communication; Rhetorical Criticism

**Bachelor of Arts**, May 2007, Communication and Political Science  
**Northern Illinois University**, Departments of Communication & Political Science  
 Communication Emphasis: Organizational/Corporate Communication  
 Political Science Emphasis: International Politics  
 Graduated Summa Cum Laude; Upper Division Honors

### Teaching Experience

**University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Department of Communication**  
 Graduate Teaching Assistant, August 2009 – present

<i>Introduction to Interpersonal Communication</i> (101) (stand alone; Course Director: Dr. Lindsay Timmerman)	Fall 2012 – present
<i>Communication in Marital &amp; Family Relationships</i> (401) (stand alone; Course Director: Dr. Lindsay Timmerman)	Fall 2010 – present
<i>Intro to Conflict Resolution/Peace Studies</i> (201) 2012 (stand alone; Course Director Dr. Nancy Burrell)	Fall 2009 – Spring

**Northern Illinois University, Department of Communication**

Graduate Teaching Assistant, August 2007 – May 2009  
 Undergraduate Teaching Assistant, Spring 2007

<i>Introduction to Interpersonal Communication</i> (303) (assistant to Dr. Betty La France)	Spring 2009
<i>Fundamentals of Oral Communication</i> (100) (stand alone; Course Director: Dr. Ferald Bryan)	Fall 2007 – Fall 2008
<i>Theories of Human Communication</i> (404) (undergraduate teaching assistant to Dr. Arthur Doederlein)	Spring 2007
<i>Introduction to Communication Theory</i> (252) (undergraduate teaching assistant to Dr. Arthur Doederlein)	Spring 2007

## Research

### Publications

Kartch, F. (in press). Book review: Rachel Taylor & Lynsey Gozna's Deception: A young person's life skill. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*.

Burrell, N., Kartch, F., Allen, M., & Hill, C. (in press). Use of demand/withdraw in marriage. In N. Burrell, M. Allen, R. Preiss, and B. Gayle (Eds.), *Managing interpersonal conflict: Advances through meta-analysis*. Mahwah, NJ: Routledge.

Allen, M., Dilbeck, K., England, N., Herrman, A., Kartch, F., Kim, J., Kulovitz, K., Lau, A., Maier, M., May, A., McNallie, J., Omori, K., & Shoji, K. (in press). Test of a causal model for sexual harassment using data from a meta-analysis. In N. Burrell, M. Allen, R. Preiss, and B. Gayle (Eds.), *Research on conflict: Advances through meta-analysis*. Mahwah, NJ: Taylor and Francis.

Henningsen, D. D., Kartch, F., Orr, N., & Brown, A. (2010). The perceptions of verbal and nonverbal flirting cues in cross-sex interactions. *Human Communication, 12*, 371-381.

### Submitted Manuscripts

Kartch, F. (under review). The development of 'feeling like a family' in stepsibling relationships: An exploration of an ambiguous relationship. Manuscript submitted for review at the *Journal of Family Communication*.

### Manuscripts In Preparation

Kartch, F. *Glee*-fully creating gender trouble and exposing the politics of homosexuality.

Kartch, F., & Herrman, A. R. 'I don't know how to say this, but...': Coming out

to the family. Manuscript being prepared for submission to the *Journal of Homosexuality*.

Kartch, F., & Tenzek, K. E., 'The pain I feel is worse than death:' Voices of nonresidential mothers. Manuscript being prepared for submission to *Women's Studies in Communication*.

Kartch, F. Turning points in the development of 'family' in stepfamilies.

Kartch, F., & Cady, C. 'Live from New York... It's parody and the female political candidate.

Herrman, A. R., Omachinski, K., Kartch, F., & Burrell, N. The displacement of blame in conflict: The use of internal and external attributions in *The Real Housewives of New York City*.

Maier, M., Turkiewicz, K. L., Kartch, F., Dindia, K., & Allen, M. Sex differences in same-sex friendships: A meta-analysis.

### Conference Presentations

Kartch, F., & Herrman, A. (2012, November). *'I don't know how to say this, but...': Coming out to the family*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, Orlando, FL.

Kartch, F., & Tenzek, K. (2012, November). *'I wish someone knew the pain that I feel': The voices of nonresidential mothers*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, Orlando, FL.

Kartch, F. (2012, November). *Glee-fully creating gender trouble and exposing the politics of homosexuality*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, Orlando, FL.

Kartch, F. (2012, November). *Are you gay? The application of GPA to sexual orientation inquiries*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, Orlando, FL.

Kartch, F., & Tenzek, K. E. (2012, July). *'The pain I feel is worse than death': Alienation, power, and the struggle for interpersonal relationships in the narratives of nonresidential mothers*. Paper presented at the International Association for Relationship Research Convention, Chicago, IL.

Kartch, F. (2011, November). *Turning points in the development of "family" in stepfamilies*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, New Orleans, LA.

- Kartch, F. (2011, November). *An ethnographic examination of gossip in a small organization: Coalitions and conflict escalation*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, New Orleans, LA.
- Maier, M., Turkiewicz, K., Kartch, F., Dindia, K., & Allen, M. (2011, November). *Sex differences in same-sex friendships: A meta-analysis*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, New Orleans, LA.
- Herrman, A., Omachinski, K., Kartch, F., & Burrell, N. (2011, November). *The displacement of blame in conflict: The use of internal and external attributions in The Real Housewives of New York City*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, New Orleans, LA.
- Ahn, S., Dilbeck, K., Glocka, J., Grimes, D., Herrman, A., Kartch, F., Maier, M., Maloney, J., Omori, K., Stache, L., Tenzek, K., Zoromski, A., Burrell, N. (2011, November). *Managing conflict while owning a small business: Saving face and figure in a health club*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, New Orleans, LA.
- Kartch, F. (2011, October). *'Maybe I forgive you and maybe I don't': Relational transgressions and forgiveness as portrayed in The Vampire Diaries*. Paper presented at the Midwest Popular Culture Association Conference, Milwaukee, WI.
- Kartch, F. (2010, November). *Twilight takes a bite out of feminism*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, San Francisco, CA.
- Kartch, F. (2010, October). *Finding conflict in LOST: Escalation, destruction, and violence*. Presented at the Midwest Popular Culture Association Conference, Minneapolis, MN.
- Kartch, F. (2009, November). *'Live from New York... It's parody and the female political candidate*. Presented at the National Communication Association Conference, Chicago, IL.
- Kartch, F. (2009, February). *Conflict escalation: Coalitions and gossip*. Presented at the Chicago Ethnography Conference, Evanston, IL.
- Kartch, F. (2008, October). *Transitioning in the wake of change: An ethnography of a small organization*. Presented at the Midwest Popular Culture Association Annual Conference, Cincinnati, OH.
- Kartch, F. (2007, April). *Yakety yak they do talk back: An ethnographic look at talk in a museum*. Presented at the Chicago Ethnography Conference, DeKalb, IL.

## Service

### **Service to the Department**

**Volunteer**, Prospective Ph.D. Student Lunch, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Spring 2013

**Student Committee Member**, Interpersonal Faculty Search and Screen Committee, Department of Communication, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Summer 2012

**Volunteer**, Prospective MA Student Lunch, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Spring 2012

**Vice-President**, Communication Graduate Student Council, Department of Communication, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Fall 2010 and Fall 2011

**Doctoral Student Mentor**, Department of Communication, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Fall 2011 – Spring 2012

**Volunteer**, Prospective MA Student Lunch, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, March 2010

**Executive Officer**, GRAD-COMM, Northern Illinois University, Department of Communication, May 2008 – May 2009

**President**, Golden Key International Honour Society, Northern Illinois University Chapter, January 2007–December 2008

**First Year Representative**, GRAD-COMM, Northern Illinois University, Department of Communication, September 2007– May 2008

**Student Senator**, NIU Student Association, September 2004 – May 2005

### **Service to the Discipline**

**Paper Reader**, Peace and Conflict Division, National Communication Association Convention, April 2013, April 2012, April 2011, March 2010

**Panel Chair**, Peace and Conflict Division, National Communication Association Convention, November 2011

**Panel Chair**, Television Division, Midwest Popular Culture Association Convention, October 2010

**Volunteer**, Job Fair, National Communication Association Convention, Chicago, IL, November 2009

**Committee Member**, 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Chicago Ethnography Conference Planning Committee, October 2007-April 2008

**Student Delegate**, 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Student Conference on United States Affairs, US Military Academy at West Point, NY, November 2006

### **Service to the Community**

**Principal Organizer**, Graduate Advisory Committee Thanksgiving Food Drive, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Department of Communication, Fall 2010

**Participant and Fundraiser**, Annual Hustle Up the Hancock, Chicago, IL, February 2010

**Principal Organizer**, Graduate Advisory Committee Thanksgiving Food Drive, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Fall 2009

### **Honors & Awards**

Amelia Lucas Trust Scholarship, awarded to provide funding for dissertation research, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Fall 2012

Paul K. Crawford Award for Excellence in Graduate Study, Northern Illinois University, 2009

Women's Studies Graduate Research Paper Award, Northern Illinois University, Spring 2009

Honorary Year Membership to NCA, awarded to one Graduate student per year from the Department of Communication faculty at Northern Illinois University, 2008-2009

Department of Communication Outstanding Major, Northern Illinois University, 2007

Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, 2007-2008

Phi Beta Delta Honor Society for International Scholars, 2007-2008

Presidential Scholarship for Outstanding Public Service in Political Science, 2006-2007

Inez H. Nelson Family Scholarship in International Relations, 2006-2007

Outstanding Woman Student, Northern Illinois University, 2007

Northern Illinois University Honors Program, 2004-2007

Northern Illinois University Dean's List, 2005-2007

Outstanding Student Honor Roll, Northern Illinois University Department of Communication, 2006-2007

Outstanding Volunteer, Midway Village & Museum Center, 2006

### **Professional Affiliations**

International Association for Relationship Research, March 2012 – present

National Communication Association, September 2008 – present

Midwest Popular Culture Association, September 2008 – September 2012

Central States Communication Association, February 2009 – February 2010

Golden Key International Honour Society, 2007 – 2008

### **Professional Development**

#### **Invited Lectures**

##### **Northern Illinois University, Department of Communication**

*Methods of Research* (691)

Fall 2012

Invited by Dr. Betty La France to discuss ethnography in a graduate course

*Methods of Research* (491)

Spring 2008

Invited by Dr. David Henningsen to discuss qualitative methods

*Introduction to Communication Theory* (252)

Spring 2007

Invited by Instructor Jessica Baldwin to discuss various methods for conducting research in communication

#### **Classroom Instructional Training**

**Classroom Instruction Book Discussion**, *Academically Adrift*, Center for Instructional and Professional Development Book Discussion Series, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Summer 2012

**Classroom Instruction Workshop**, First Day Strategies, Center for Instructional and Professional Development Workshop Series, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Summer 2012

**Classroom Instruction Workshop**, Low Stakes Assessment, Center for Instructional and Professional Development Workshop Series, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Fall 2011

**Classroom Instruction Workshop**, Beyond Techniques: Easily Adapt Your Course Session to Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, Center for Instructional and Professional Development Workshop Series, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Fall 2011

## **Methodological Training**

**Qualitative Methods Workshop**, Qualitative Methods in Social Research: Rationale, Examples, and Pitfalls, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Summer 2011

**Research Assistant** for Dr. Kathleen Valde, Northern Illinois University, Spring 2009

**Research Team Member** for Dr. David Henningsen, Fall 2008 and Fall 2009

## **Certifications**

**Safe Space Certification**, LGBT Resource Center, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, January 2013

Workshop on how to serve as an ally for LGBT+ students on campus and within the larger community