

Moral Orientations to Post-divorce Fatherhood: Examining Finnish Men's Descriptive Practices

Authors: Forsberg Hannele, Autonen-Vaaraniemi
Leena University of Tampere, Finland

Introduction

It is claimed that divorce is often a more difficult life change for men than for women. Men worry more than women about the splitting up of a nuclear family, and they also view divorce more negatively. (Helsingin Sanomat, 2011.) Many children lose contact with fathers to a greater or lesser extent when their parents divorce and divorce is argued to erode fatherhood (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999; Autonen-Vaaraniemi, 2010; Lamb, 1999; Seltzer, 1991). In any case, divorce damages the stability of the family and fundamentally changes the parental partnership. Divorce challenges parenthood, causing it to be reassessed and reformulated. Divorcing parents have to make decisions on child custody and visitation rights, and other issues that are not easy to resolve. It is argued that, in divorce cases, men are discriminated against in negotiations on the custody, maintenance and living arrangements of their children (Nathanson and Young, 2006; Malmi, 2009: 321–325), despite the general belief that continuity of parenting is in the child's best interest, and the fact that joint custody is a central norm in both legislation and professional practices in many countries. When divorcing, parents need to strike a balance between the potentially contradictory requirements of a child's needs and their emotions towards their ex-partner. Smart and Neale (1999: 71–72, 133–135) state that the collapse of the nuclear family ideal has created a moral dilemma for divorcing parents. To be solved, the dilemma possibly requires parents to develop new moral perspectives.

This article examines men's moral orientations to post-divorce fatherhood. By moral orientations we refer to men's specific ways of describing 'the right thing to do' when deciding about child care in the case of their divorce experience. Different moral orientations have different consequences for post-divorce fatherhood, the father-child relationship and the divorced man's relationship with his ex-wife. It is important, therefore, to examine moral orientations of the parties involved in divorce cases. In light of the growing demand in Western societies that people, rather than the public sector, take responsibility for caring for one another (van der Heijden et al. 2016), there is a need both to

theorise the gender relations shaping the provision of care (Doucet, 2006; Featherstone, 2009; Miller, 2011) and to obtain empirical knowledge about how people reflect on the responsibility for care in everyday life.

Internationally, in the social sciences, divorce has mainly been studied from the viewpoint of women and children, to the relative neglect of the position or experiences of fathers, although the topic has been taken up in a few studies. (e.g. Philip, 2014; Arditti, 1995; Arendell, 1995; Huttunen, 2001; Kruk, 1994). In Finland, the Nordic country context of the present study, empirical studies on divorce, despite its high prevalence, have also been surprisingly few (Kiiski, 2011: 37).

Nevertheless, a substantial literature exists on present-day fatherhood, indicating that fathers are more practically involved and emotionally engaged in family life than has traditionally been the case (e.g. Eerola and Mykkänen, 2014; Miller and Dermott, 2015). It is this observation which forms the broader context for our study on fathers' practical moral dilemmas in their post-divorce fathering. This article contributes to the research on divorce and men, with particular interest in the gender-sensitive issue of post-divorce fatherhood. The core concern of this article is closely allied to what in family studies is known as the ethical turn (Morgan, 2011: 127–129); that is, a focus on ordinary people's everyday practices and negotiations concerning family relations and related moral dilemmas (Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2000).

Divorce, post-divorce fatherhood and morals

Our starting point is that divorce challenges fatherhood: fatherhood is no longer self-evident; instead, it has to be reconstructed, argued for and justified in the new post-divorce circumstances (Smart and Neale, 1999: 114–117; Autonen-Vaaranieni, 2010). Catlett and McKenry (2004: 180) claim that divorce may impact more strongly on a father's relationship to his child than is the case with mothers, as the mother is usually considered a child's primary carer. Divorce changes the

gender order of the partnership and family and thus challenges a man's gendered authority and power in family relationships.

By moral orientations we mean the ways in which fathers describe, evaluate and justify their divorce-related and subsequent practical moral dilemmas; that is, their reflections on what was 'the right thing to do' regarding the care and living arrangements of their children. Moral orientations are approached here through men's descriptive practices, that is, the situational communicative processes by which their post-divorce family relations are represented (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990: 26–28). Moral orientations are closely linked to practical moral reasoning, an activity that has become important in the study of current family life, where people's negotiations and decisions, rather than abstract norms and principles, have been found to be an important source of morality and a motor of family life (van der Heijden et al. 2016; Philip, 2014; Neale and Smart, 2002). Similarly, Ives (2015) speaks about the idea of the 'deliberative father', which recognises fatherhood as a distinctly moral activity of negotiating parenthood in the presence of dilemmatic tensions regarding who should do what and why, with fathers striving to do fatherhood well and develop 'fairness' in their fathering practices. Here, however, we prefer to use the concept of moral orientation, as it is better suited to the nature of the interview data used in the analysis. The interview data comprise men's descriptions of what they consider the proper thing to do, rather than actual negotiations around divorce-related dilemmas. The approach also draws on the theories on the ethics of care (e.g. Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Tronto, 1993) which stress that morals should be examined from the viewpoint of reciprocal care and nurturing as the practical moral dilemmas encountered by social actors in their daily lives and social networks. The ethics of care involves not only caring for others, but also a balancing act between personal needs and those of others (Finch and Mason, 1993; Gilligan, 1982).

Questions of responsibility are an intrinsic part of solving practical divorce-related moral dilemmas (Forsberg, 2013). When people try to solve a conflict situation by justifying their views and by weighing the best possible alternatives, they inevitably pay attention to who or what people are considered to be responsible for solving the problem (Kurri and Wahlström, 2005: 352). The dimension of responsibility also includes questions of what and whose rights are referred to in conflict situations. Attention is also paid to the emergence of possible compromises. (Thomson, 1999: 5–29). Responsibility is a relevant perspective in considering family relationships, especially when examining the ways in which parents show responsibility for their children and themselves (e.g. Brannen, Heptinstall and Bhopal, 2000; Such and Walker, 2004).

Data and Method

The data consist of interviews with sixteen divorced or separated Finnish men, and was originally gathered for the purpose of examining men's relationship to home (Autonen-Vaaranemi, 2009). The interviews yielded rich descriptions of the men's experiences of child-related divorces, and thus highly suited to the present purpose of shedding light on men's moral orientations to post-divorce fatherhood. The men were interviewed (in depth) three times in their homes. The purpose of the in-depth interviews was to obtain deeper knowledge of divorced men's experiences by extending the timeline of the interview encounters. The interviews were conducted over periods varying from approximately two weeks to two months. The interviewer was female (and a parent) and the interviews were conducted in Finnish. The data was transcribed for the analysis. The data excerpts were translated into English in order to extract the general sense and the meanings of themes rather than a literal word-for-word translation. It is, however, possible that essential information can get lost in these translations and is difficult to recover (see Nikander, 2008).

The men represent a spectrum of Finnish men and reveal the ordinary and everyday character of the lives of divorced fathers. The age of the interviewees is 30 to 50 years, with the oldest in their

sixties. The men are middle or working class and of white Finnish ethnicity. The interviewees were recruited by the snowball method, contacting key individuals by public announcements through such media as newspaper, the internet, a radio broadcast, and an art exhibition on men and divorce. All data were collected following the (current Finnish) guidelines on research ethics (prevailing in Finland). The interviewees were told the purpose of the research and they gave their written informed consent. The data have been anonymized and all the names given in the text are pseudonyms.

For the majority of the fathers, the divorce or separation had taken place several years previously. Most of the men were non-residential parents, but all had joint custody of their children. Three of the men were residential parents. This is in line with national patterns: statistics show that joint custody is chosen in the majority of divorce cases. However, residential parenthood by a post-divorce father is rare, as about 80% of children with divorced parents remain with their mothers. (Lapsen elatus ja huolto, 2015.) At the time of the interviews, some of the men lived alone, while others had a step-family. In some cases, the men's children were pre-school or of school age, while the oldest interviewees had grown-up children and grandchildren. The men spoke of their divorce from the longer perspective of their life course. This means that the temporal context of the divorce is longer than if the divorce were recent. In trying to understand family change, social research has increasingly emphasized the importance of adopting the perspective of different life stages, as snapshot descriptions of family relationships can be misleading or incomplete (Gray et al. 2016: 9).

The data were analysed (by both authors), first, by identifying passages in the interviews where the men talk about moral dilemmas in divorce decisions related to parenthood and children, and the decisions they took at that time. These moral dilemmas, as will be shown in the empirical sections, were, for example, related to the residential arrangements of children after the divorce, the man pondering on whether to stay or move out of the family home and whether it would be better that

his ex-wife and children remained there. The main elements of the men's claims, such as grounds, conclusions and assumptions, were identified and coded. The men's talk was also examined for utterances indicating moral principles, the adjectives used and explanations. The coding focused on the central themes of, and negotiations concerning the men's moral dilemmas. The main themes were distinct and easy to identify. The focus of the analysis then moved on to how the men argue for and justify their decisions. In order to pinpoint the moral content of the accounts, special attention was paid to how the men use evaluative language, such as dividing phenomena into good or bad, right or wrong. Reading the data in this way made it possible to categorise the central moral orientations of the men (cf. Thomson, 1999). The analysis is an inductive – bottom-up – analysis, looking for moral talk in the men's accounts. The data excerpts below have been chosen as best illustrating the phenomena of interest.

Fathers' moral orientations in post-divorce circumstances

Guilt over the Consequences of Divorce for Children

The notion that divorce is harmful for children is a central assumption that the fathers in our study reflect on in pondering their moral conflicts. They are aware that the conflict is partly their own doing, since they share the wish to divorce. At the same time, they feel guilt over the possible negative consequences of divorce for the children. They report that they have been extremely concerned for their children during the divorce and afraid of its consequences for them. Guilt is a moral emotion that motivates a need for compensation (Takala, 1998). Examples of such compensation work can be found in the excerpts below:

‘So I was actually hoping that we could somehow make a go of it until the children were a bit older.’ (Antero)

‘That was the only factor that at first delayed my divorce, I kept thinking about how long we’d have to stay together with the children before I could start getting a divorce ... so that ... but there just isn’t a good age for that.’ (Aarne)

Both Antero and Aarne describe how they sought to avoid possible harm to their children as a result their divorce by postponing the divorce until the children were older. In this way, they tried to compensate for the harm they assumed the decision to divorce would cause their children.

Fathers’ guilt is also evident in the later stages of divorce, such as in the decisions on residential arrangements. Here, the men’s dominant moral tone is to avoid additional harm to children by keeping their everyday life as unchanged as possible. This orientation, showing an appreciation of the children’s needs, is shown in self-sacrificing actions by the men, like moving away from the family home and finding another place to live.

In the next excerpts, the divorced fathers report feeling it was the right thing to move away from the family home, so as to guarantee some continuity in the children’s life:

‘I was doing well financially [and capable of moving away], so I thought that it would be better for the child, or it was mostly in the child’s best interests’ and nothing else, that the child would have a good environment.’ (Markku)

‘When I left, and we were living our own flat then, well I left everything there, like if we’d started to divvy it up then the children would also have had to move, so all I did was shoulder my backpack and put my coat on.’ (Matti)

‘There was the children’s day care and stuff, good carers and so on, it’s close to schools and that’s why we bought the flat in the first place, just because all the things

that are important for children are close by, so I thought, why should I go and blow up the whole shebang.’ (Juha)

Continuity of the children’s environment is moral compensation for the father moving away.

Ensuring continuity means, for example, a stable home, day care, school, friends, food and adequate food and rest for a child. The smooth running of the everyday life of their children is a central issue for these men. It is an important part of the moral orientation of divorcing men that they prioritise their children’s needs as far as possible.

When prioritising the child’s needs, the fathers accept responsibility for the post-divorce arrangements. They seek to take into account the possible damaging effects of the divorce on the child. Seeing things from the perspective of a child’s needs enables compromise between the parents, even if they find it difficult to get along with each other. Maybe the objective is that both parents share the blame for the possible effects of the divorce on the children.

Maintaining and Sharing Parenthood – a Matter of Course

The majority of the men studied shared custody with their ex-partners such that their offspring lived with the mother and the men assumed the role of non-residential fathers. The divorced fathers who had opted for joint custody justified their decision as a matter of course, as can be seen in the next data extract:

Interviewer: ‘How did you choose it [joint custody]?’

Teemu: ‘I don’t know, it seemed, it was sort of self-evident.’

Interviewer: ‘So it was all right with both of you?’

Teemu: 'Yes, and we didn't really discuss it specially.'

In the men's accounts, both parents opted for joint custody almost automatically. The men do not describe the decision as a process of negotiation between the parents, as a weighing of options or arguments. Thus, the decision of joint custody seems a natural and automatic moral choice.

Most men consider that having joint custody has worked well in practice. They consider it good that they are able to see their children as often as they like. The children come and visit their fathers, mostly at weekends and during holidays. The fathers stress that after the divorce they have wanted to live close to their children, especially if they are very young. The men feel that staying close enables more flexible access to the children and facilitates taking the children back and forth. Here, post-divorce fatherhood means acts and activities, the father's choices and decisions over the child's everyday life. The fathers talk of good fatherhood in terms of daily routines, physical care and providing the children with emotional support. These findings reveal a moral orientation of men that is based on care and nurturing, being there for others.

According to most of the divorced fathers, it is important to maintain good relations with their ex-wife for the children's sake. The men argue that parents must be able to agree on the access to the children and to discuss their upbringing and lives in general. In this way, the divorced fathers are using children's needs as a moral justification for the continuity of post-divorce parenting. When the men speak on behalf of joint custody, they are constructing not only good, harmonious and co-operative fatherhood, but also the continuity of mothering after the divorce.

The moral orientation that emphasises the importance of the continuity of parenthood is variously nuanced in the men's descriptions. Most of the fathers seem to value co-operative fatherhood and motherhood. The following excerpt illustrates this issue:

‘We haven’t agreed anything definite on the children’s visits, luckily I have a very good relationship with my ex-wife, we don’t have any problems regarding it and at the moment they [mother and sons] are in fact living about half a mile away from me, either of us can phone to say that the boys would like to go out, would you go with them.’ (Teemu)

In underlining the importance of the continuity of parenthood the fathers are indicating that they share the responsibility for making decisions concerning children with the mothers. Hence, the fathers themselves are also taking responsibility for continuing their fatherhood after the divorce. In this way, the long-term consequences of divorce for the children are taken into account. The orientation to sharing child care might mean that the parents are making compromises. When weighing the rightness of their actions, guilt, which is a part of the responsibility issue, is divided between the parents.

To some of the interviewed fathers, it was self-evident that that the best place after divorce for a child, especially a small child, is with the mother. Again, the fathers justify their orientation to child care by reference to the child’s needs. The idea of the child’s needs and the question of the continuity of parenthood are intertwined:

‘Well it was more or less, as far as I remember, it’s been eight years now, but yes it was pretty clear-cut. I can’t recall that we even talked about the possibility of [the child] staying with me.’ (Teemu)

‘Well he was two at the time and it did seem like the most natural solution then, that a child of his age would live with his mother mainly anyway, for at that stage you can’t really ask the child himself like which parent would you like to live with.’ (Mikko)

‘I think that the children must live with their mother, I don’t know, I just have this kind of, nobody has told me or taught me that, but I have somehow got this feeling that I think it is somehow more natural.’ (Juha)

These extracts show that while orientating to the natural primacy of motherhood, the men personally orientate to non-residential fatherhood, giving residential parenthood to the mother. In doing so, the fathers shift the primary care responsibility from themselves in divorce. These fathers do not reflect on the possible harmful effects of this decision on the child. The decision on joint custody, and non-residential fatherhood, seems to be unproblematically constructed as a natural part of a child’s life after divorce.

Fighting for Fatherhood

A couple of the men in the study reported that their children were snatched from them in the divorce. These fathers’ moral orientation is based on the principle of fathers’ rights, and they blame their situation on women having the upper hand. They also stressed that women social workers allied themselves with their ex-wives in the divorce situation. The next extract is from a father who for several years fought for the custody of his child in various courts:

‘The time when she was living with her mother, no one was interested in whether she could see her father, but then after she moved to in with her father, all these ladies from the social were moaning about how’s she ever going to see her mother, I said I’m not interested, if she does then she does, so even if it was, like it was found when people went to check, that the child had been living in filthy conditions so even then the public authorities still have that attitude, so in my opinion Finland is, it’s ruled by

those ladies from the social, it really gets my goat every time I remember that but then when the facts were made clear they just couldn't help but say that that was how things were. (Markku)

Using the argument that women have the upper hand, some of the interviewees claim that they have not received justice in the resolutions of divorce disputes. They feel that they have not personally been able to affect the authorities' decisions about child-related issues in divorce. The responsibility for the situation is transferred to the professionals dealing with divorce, who are then seen as responsible for the resolution of child custody disputes between parents. The men shift parental responsibility for such decisions to outside actors. At the same time, possible blame for the consequences of the divorce decision is also shifted elsewhere.

In the next extract, the father gives a reason for the supremacy of mothers:

Interviewer: 'Then what about, different people make different decisions, why was it that in your case the children stayed with their mother and you left?'

Juha: 'I don't know, I suppose it's more like, how should I put it, more sort of a product of society and the social system like, I mean it does go that way usually. Like if the mother isn't a down-and-out alkie and wastrel or using drugs, so then.'

The priority of mothers is considered to be a deeply-embedded socio-cultural idea that is rarely questioned. In the data, the idea that 'women rule' was used by fathers who described their divorces as quarrelsome and difficult.

Personal Freedom

A minority of the men in our study describe their decision to be a non-residential parent from the perspective of their own need for independence and a desire for an easier life. The extract below sheds light on this orientation.

Interviewer: 'Then what about the children stayed with their mother, why was that?'

Lasse: 'Well, one reason was that I'm away for long stretches at school you know and another was maybe that I need to spend time on my own and actually alone, that I might not, it's pretty tough to admit this even to myself, but maybe I'm not that much of a family type really, that I'd really enjoy being there, which is of course what today's norms require. [---] Because I do feel that I can't necessarily live with the children as single parent, I'm better at living alone than with the children, after all.'

Interviewer: 'So is that related to your wanting to be on your own and so on?'

Lasse: 'Well, maybe it's that I have such a great need for time on my own and space and just being by myself.'

In this case, the father's own needs for peace and quiet overrides those of the children. The needs for independence and freedom have been regarded as typical manifestations of masculinity (Walzer and Oles, 2003: 339–340). When speaking of their personal needs for independence and freedom, the divorced fathers in the study express a moral orientation based on individual rights. Good fatherhood is no longer intact. At the same time, these men go against the moral orientation, dominant in the data, of prioritising the children's needs.

Right to Expect Companionship from Adult Children?

As described earlier, our data consist not only of divorced fathers with minor children, but also of a few fathers at a later life stage and whose children are already adults (the divorce happened when the children were younger). Interestingly, these older men, who are living alone, take up the topic of companionship as a something they expect from their adult children. Although they have friends, these men describe feelings of loneliness in relation to their children and wish that their adult children, who are living in their own homes, would get in touch with their father more often. The men are unhappy because they feel they see their children and grandchildren too seldom. In the next excerpt, a father evaluates his daughters' behaviour:

'Last year they [the daughters] visited me twice, that was for my birthday and before Christmas and I said that I don't place any value on these visits, like I'd appreciate it a lot more if you'd just drop by unexpectedly some evening and be like, hey, here I am and could we have some coffee. See that would please me much more than when they come because of what day it is. [---] Then when I've asked them about it sometimes, like don't you think you could phone me sometimes, then it's I'm too busy, I don't have the time. They must be really almighty busy.' (Kauko)

The negative evaluation of his daughters' behaviour by the ageing father reveals a moral orientation of ambivalence. He simultaneously brings up opposing expectations about how his adult children should act: they should just drop by rather than schedule their visits. It is possible that the divorce has eroded the father-child relationship, adding the feeling of ambivalence. Pillemer and colleagues (2012) noticed that fathers tend to have greater ambivalence than mothers towards their adult children. The moral paradox between the expectations of letting the adult child to live their own life and her staying in touch with her ageing father is evident there.

The present ageing, divorced fathers draw attention to the fact that children are not only minors but also grown-ups. From the life stage perspective of these ageing divorced fathers, their relationship with their children and their expectations of them has changed. The men's expectations of social interaction and respite from loneliness are directed towards their own children, not to friends or partners. The men perhaps expect gratitude and reciprocity from their children for the parental care that they received in childhood. The ageing father's divorce crisis is over, and thinking of the primacy of a child's needs is no longer important. In his old age, the father is allowed and has the right to think first and foremost of himself instead of his children. The men describe their relationship with their adult children from the perspective of their own needs. This demonstrates a wish for lifetime continuity of the parent-child relationship. Advancing years and the passage of time seem to change the direction of the (moral) principles governing fatherhood and children in divorced men.

For the men in the study, the best way to solve the problem of loneliness lies in family relationships. By referring to the duties of their adult children, these fathers attribute responsibility for the problem to the children. Hence, the adult children are also responsible for making the right decisions. The men blame their loneliness on their children and do not consider the relationship from the viewpoint of reciprocity.

While this orientation was marginal in our data (only a few of the interviewed men were old enough to talk about relationships between fathers and adult children), the theme reminds us how a father's thinking about parenthood and his relationship to his child might change over the long term when several years have passed since the divorce.

Discussion

Above, we examined the moral orientations of fathers in child-related divorce decisions. The examination not only concerned acute divorce situations, but also extended to men whose divorce had taken place many years earlier. Having a broader time horizon allowed more nuances to be captured in the men's orientations: they attempted to compensate for their guilt over the divorce by taking different actions, such as being there for the children in everyday life, and fighting for their fatherhood or for individual freedom, while in their old age and loneliness they expected to receive companionship from their adult children. The more general ethical notions of fairness, sacrifice and reputation (see Morgan, 2011: 134–135) are clearly visible in these orientations. The divorced fathers studied here drew on their individual life situations and life experiences, although at the same time their orientations can be interpreted as representative of the dominant socio-cultural ideals of good parenthood. Through the concern they expressed over doing the right thing in the divorce process and in their post-divorce decisions, the fathers constructed themselves as good moral persons.

The findings also call for reflection on the gendering of what constitutes good and proper post-divorce parenthood. The moral complexity and diverse solutions of post-divorce fatherhood became evident when seen from the perspectives of pragmatic ethics (see Ives 2015: 290) and the reflexivity of the interviewed fathers (Williams, 2008). Interestingly, our findings resemble those reported on post-divorce fatherhood by Philip (2013), but they also differ in that our study included moral reasoning by fathers from a longitudinal perspective, including elderly fathers for whom many years have elapsed since their divorce. Chambers and colleagues (2009) argue that more knowledge is needed about family members 'linked lives' and people's multigenerational bonds, as these may be overtaking nuclear family ties for well-being and support over the life-course (ibid. 10).

The men's descriptive practices included features regarded as typical of both men and women. The men's care-based morality represents the current societal discourse of the new, caring father (e.g.

Lamb, 2000; Pleck and Pleck, 1997; Eerola and Mykkänen, 2014), as well as societal discourse on good mothering that entails the prioritisation of children's needs (e.g. May, 2008: 476–478). To some extent, it was also possible to detect individualism and a rights-based ethics in the men's talk, which have been seen as typically masculine ways of justifying one's viewpoint (Walzer and Oles, 2003: 339–340). However, we did not find evidence of the ethic of the pure father-child relationship that Dermott found to be an important feature of current fatherhood in the UK (2008: 142), if the present older fathers' wishes for more companionship with their adult children is not interpreted as an example of this. It is possible that, in fathering, pure emotional intimacy is easier to achieve in nuclear family situations, where the mother tends to focus mainly on the ethics of the responsibility of care. Moreover, paternal ambivalence in combining the role of breadwinner and child carer (e.g. Dermott 2008; Gatrell et al. 2014, 17–24; Miller, 2010) was not an issue in our data. The men's talk of moral dilemmas in post-divorce situations focused on family relationships, and did not deal, for example, with the duties of working life.

The morality shown by the men in their divorce decision-making exhibits a hierarchical order, with children's needs as the primary concern (compare Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2000: 799–800). However, this hierarchy is not unambiguous. The fact that the orientations presented to justify a given action vary means that the attribution of responsibility also varies (Kurri and Wahlström, 2005: 352). When the moral orientation is towards care, the men in the study assume responsibility for the divorce decision or share it with their ex-wives. When a rights-based orientation is given, the men evoke more general societal responsibility. The responsibility for a decision may also be transferred to professionals. The cultural burden of the dominant ideology of the supremacy of motherhood imposes pressures on professionals whose work includes dealing with divorce. Another issue worth pondering is how far professionals should assume responsibility for people's relationships and family-related problems in their private lives. Where is the line between

professional help and assuming responsibilities that properly belong to the parents themselves?

Fathers' personal ways of orientating morally to divorce decisions may remain invisible if they are not subjected to reflective examination. These orientations contribute to the resolving of divorce disputes and to the weighing of the best possible solution in divorce situations. Hence it is also important that the professionals dealing with divorce are able to identify them.

Fathers' different moral orientations to divorce dilemmas have different consequences for how they construct their post-divorce fatherhood, father-child relationship and their relationship with their ex-partner. Practical ethics implies different solutions to parenthood-related and child-related divorce disputes. Arguments based on different principles "pull" in different directions. Awareness of these makes it possible to opt for different decisions in the event of divorce. The moral orientations of the parties involved can either promote or complicate the process of resolving issues related to parenthood and children in divorce situations. The search for the best possible solution is difficult as it may take many different shapes. The (re)solving of parental divorce disputes can drag on through the courts for several years. If the dispute is seen as a matter of fathers' rights and gender equality, it may push a child's real needs into second place.

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