

*Factors Influencing a Divorced Father's  
Involvement with His Children*

David W. Appleby, Ph.D.

Center for Counseling and Family Studies

Liberty University

FATHERS TOUCH  
by  
Gillian Campbell

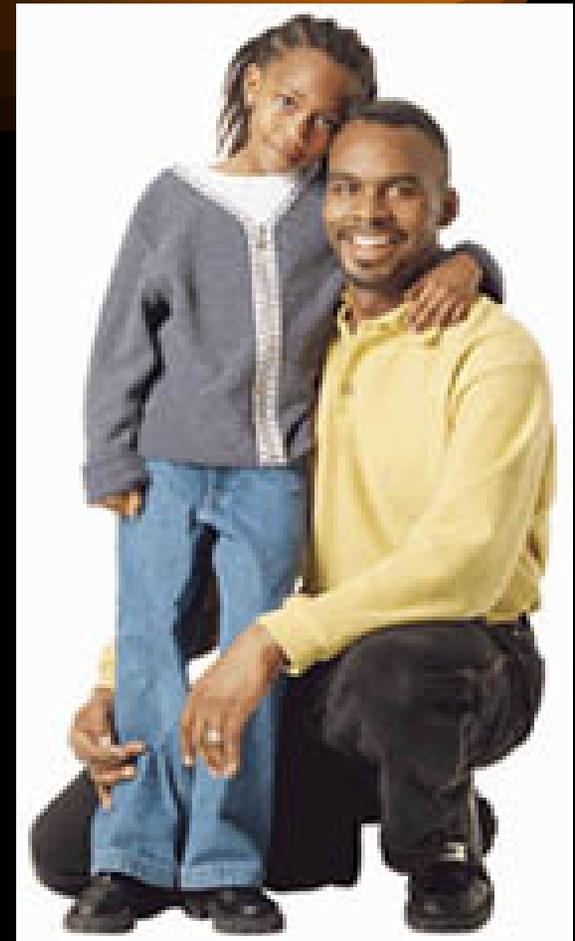
# *Historical Contexts in the 1960s*

- Falling wages for male high school graduates.
- Increased numbers of women in the workforce.
- Greater acceptance of divorce.
- Rise of individualism.
- Rise of men as primary nonmarital caretakers. (Amato, 2000; Gerson, 1993)



# Results

- Divorce – roughly half of marriages will experience divorce. (Amato, 2000)
- Cohabitation is the model path to marriage. (Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005)
- Illegitimacy – 33% of births are to unmarried women. (Ventura & Bachrach, 2000)
- Perceived value of fathers in families is often questioned. (Flouri, 2005)



# Statistics

- Within a couple of years after divorce 30-40% of American children no longer see their nonresident parent and about 20-30% see their parent as often as once a week. (Clarke-Stewart & Wayward, 1996)
- More recent data indicates that between 18-25% of American children have no contact with their fathers two to three years after divorce. (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002)



# Why?

- Are fathers weakly attached to their kids (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985) or to their father role? (Popenoe, 1996)
- Does male biology pull them away from long term parental investment? (Popenoe, 1996)
- Are men just rotten to the core & snakes in the grass? (Women, 2005)



## *Unsuccessful*

- “To date, social scientists have been remarkably unsuccessful in their efforts to understand why so many men have removed themselves or allowed themselves to be excluded from their children’s lives, although the adverse effects of absent fathers on child development have been well documented” (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2003, p. 16)

*What factors influence these men?*



# *Physical and Emotional Factors*

- Increase in emotional problems
  - 9X more hospitalizations
  - Over represented in suicides & homicides (Mayer, 1994)
- Increase in accidents and deaths
  - Auto accidents double 6 mo. before and after (Bloom, 1975)
- Increase in physical problems
  - Weight loss
  - Ophthalmologic problems
  - Dental problems
  - Hypertension
  - Rheumatoid arthritis
  - Headaches
  - Diabetes, etc. (Greif, 1979; Ambrose, Harper, & Pemberton, 1983)



# *Confusion*

- More women instigate divorce proceedings. (Brinig & Allen, 2000)
- Many men are unsure as to what precipitated the divorce. (Kruk, 1993)
- Often believe overinvestment in work = dedication to family welfare. Wives see it as lack of interest and commitment. (Kruk, 1993)

# *Radical Change in Life Patterns*

- 2 months after divorce – more work, more household activities, more solitude
- Loses contact with old friends, casual dating and sex frequent first year. (Mayer, 1994)
- Felt deprived of family, rootless, at loose ends; yearns for a stable loving family (Ambert, 1980)
- Experiences much stress
  - Changes in residence
  - Financial changes
  - Loss of social network



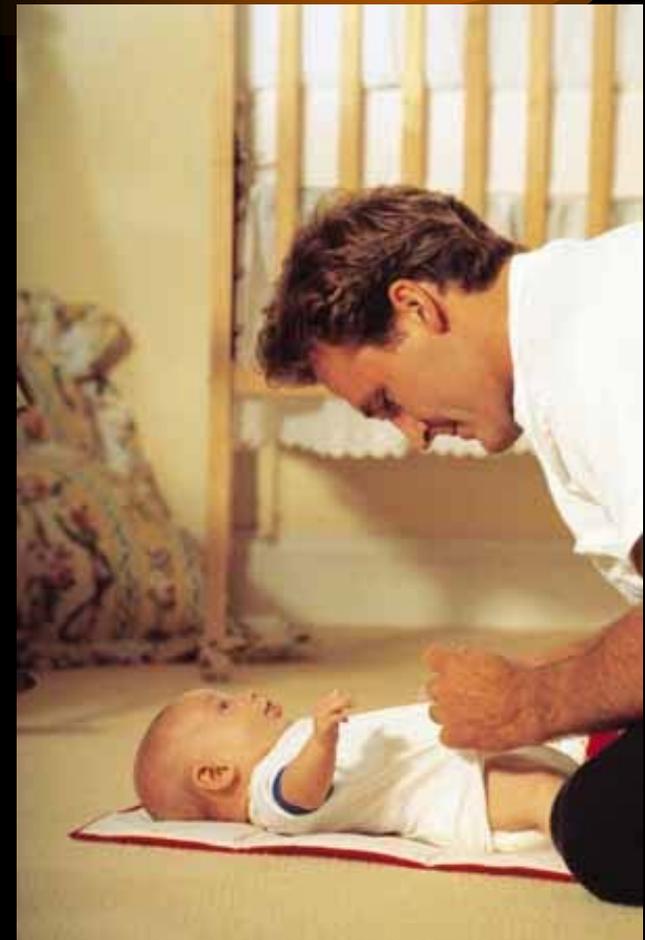
# *Loss of Self-Esteem*

- Labels and concepts applied to men and fathers include:
  - Incompetent, unaware, underdeveloped femininity, fear of intimacy, distant, infantile, emotional children, emotionally constricted, emotionally constipated, alexithymic, toxic masculinity, hypermasculine, masculopathy, narcissistic, abusive, oppressive (Corneau (as cited in Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997).
- Loneliness and long appear – signs of loss of self-esteem.
- Lonely men seen as less well adjusted, socially acceptable, and efficient in performing social roles. (Borys, Perlman & Goldenberg, 1982)
- People less tolerant of lonely men.
- Many men have fear of loneliness. (Jacobs, 1983)



# *Loss of Sense of Competence*

- Role of primary caretaker of preschool children is unfamiliar.
- Role of “homemaker” unfamiliar.
- Hard to provide home-like setting where he can father and family can do things that families do.
- Difficult to provide for children’s preferences, needs. (Kruk, 1993)
- “Visitation” forestalls the intimacy necessary to meet children’s emotional needs. (Rutner, 1992)
- Having lots of money helps.



# *Loss of Control*

- Loss of control over feelings, marriage, children, money, everything...
- Life has no order. He has no scripts to follow. (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980)
- Sense of justice violated; feels righteous rage. (Arditti, 1992)
- Unable to force expectations on X and children.
- Many refuse to cooperate or compromise with their children's custodial parent. (Arendell, 1995)
- Denial of rights seen as "forced impotence".



## *Loss of Control...*

- “I will not be a visiting uncle. I refuse to let some woman (former wife), judge, attorney, or social worker reduce me to that status. I’m a parent and parents do not visit their children. If I see my child only every other weekend, I become nothing more than a visiting uncle. I am a father in name only at this point. Until and unless I can be a father in every sense, I simply refuse to have any part of this.” (Arendell, 1995, pp. 146-147)

# *Children's Coerced Complicity*

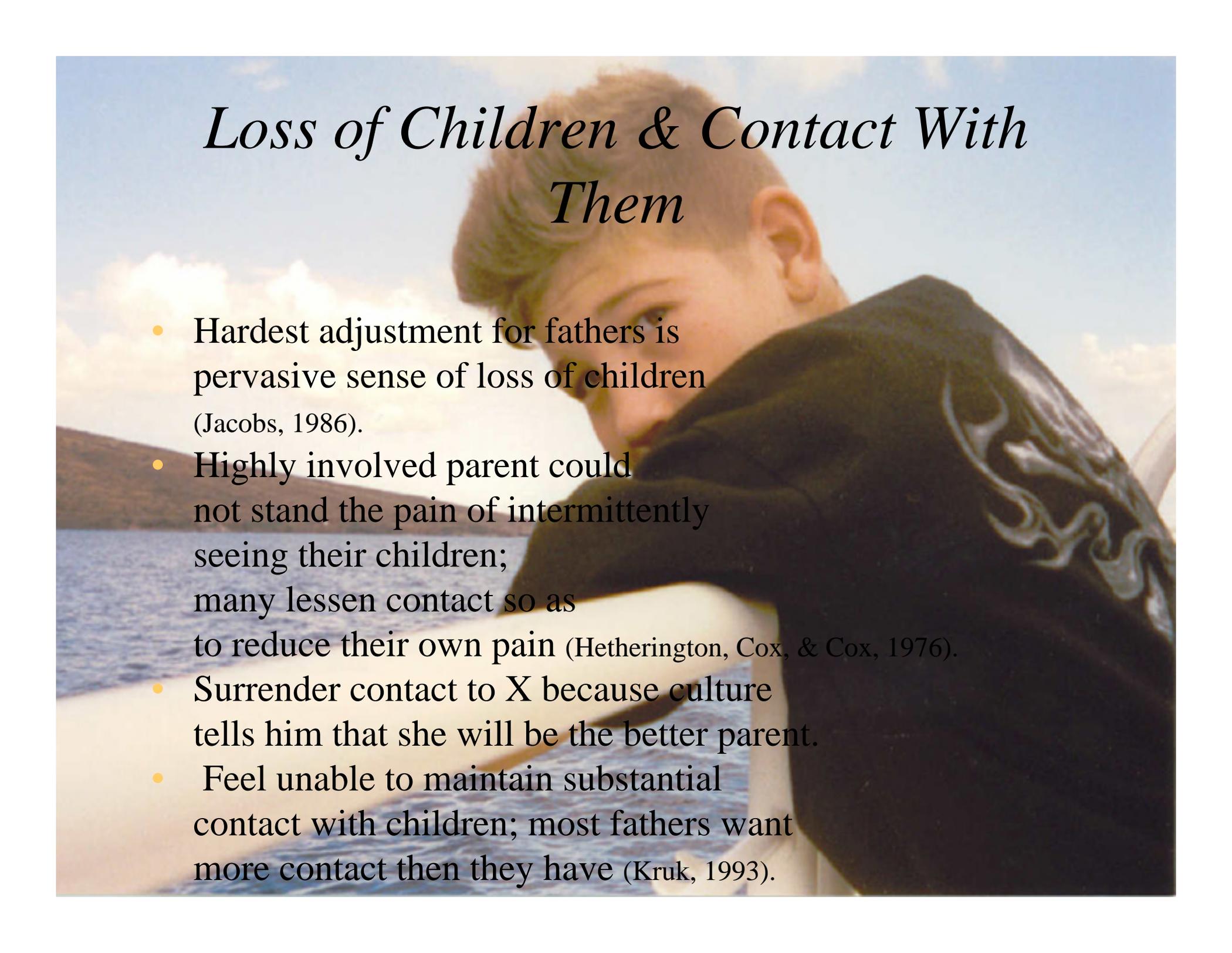
- Children seen as having “joined the other side,” victims of “maternal brainwashing.”
  - Children take sides and defend mother’s actions.
- X seen as active conspirator.
- Can’t trust X or children. Children are “spies.”
- As children age they resist “visiting” Dad.
- Dad steadily disengages from children who are seen as unappreciative/rejecting
  - Children complain about money, suggesting fathers are responsible for reduced standard of living. (Arendell, 1995)



# Role Loss

- Victim of “parentectomy” – removed from role by X’s boyfriend or stepfather. (Williams, 1986)
- Importance = involvement; not important = less involvement (Baum, 2004)
- Little significant input into lives of children compels father to make each visit as positive as possible – Disneyland Dad
  - Refuses to discipline – wants his little time to be positive.
  - Makes X feel undermined and the “heavy.”
- May express anger and frustration during intense custody battles. (Kruk, 1993)



A young boy with short brown hair, wearing a black wetsuit with a white flame-like graphic on the sleeve, is looking over his right shoulder towards the camera. The background shows a sunset over a body of water with a dark landmass in the distance under a blue and orange sky.

# *Loss of Children & Contact With Them*

- Hardest adjustment for fathers is pervasive sense of loss of children (Jacobs, 1986).
- Highly involved parent could not stand the pain of intermittently seeing their children; many lessen contact so as to reduce their own pain (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1976).
- Surrender contact to X because culture tells him that she will be the better parent.
- Feel unable to maintain substantial contact with children; most fathers want more contact than they have (Kruk, 1993).

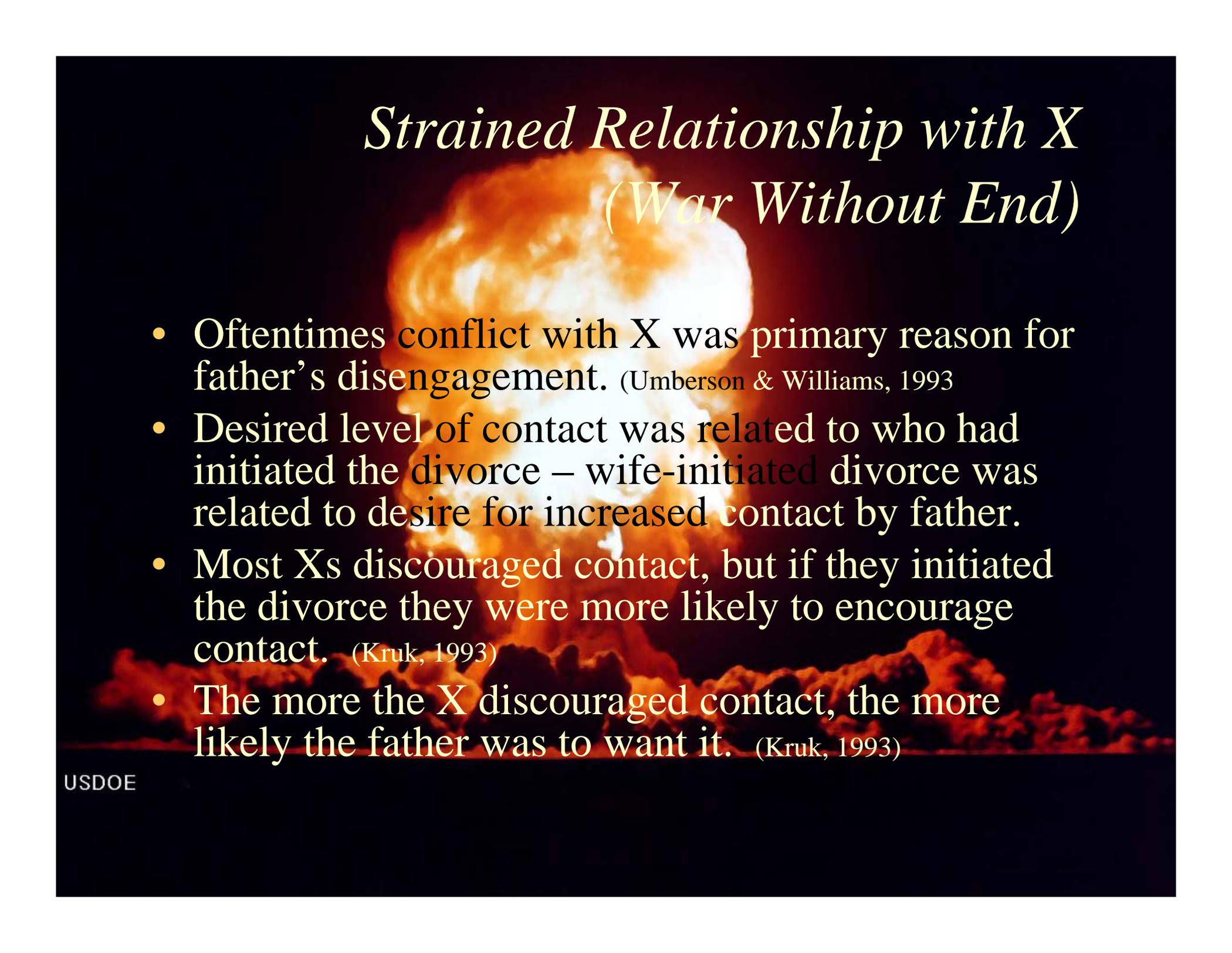
## *Loss of Children (cont.)*

- Paternal identity becomes measured by amount of control & power he has over children and amount of overnight time spent with him – overnights allow “family life” to appear normal.
- Fathers feel hopeless and impotent in struggle for parental identity.
- Fathers generally react in one of two ways
  - Give up and withdraw
  - Fight ferociously to maintain parental identity
- Father who wants the best for his children is put in a lose-lose situation. (Williams, 1986)

## *Loss of Children (cont.)*

- Being separated by “inconvenient” distances lessens contact.
- New emotional obligations (wives, girlfriends, children) lessen contact. (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991)
- Two years after divorce 2/3s of all children have virtually no contact with their fathers. (Marsiglio, 2004)



A large, bright orange and yellow nuclear explosion mushroom cloud is centered in the background against a dark, almost black sky. The explosion is the focal point of the slide's background.

## *Strained Relationship with X* *(War Without End)*

- Oftentimes conflict with X was primary reason for father's disengagement. (Umberson & Williams, 1993)
- Desired level of contact was related to who had initiated the divorce – wife-initiated divorce was related to desire for increased contact by father.
- Most Xs discouraged contact, but if they initiated the divorce they were more likely to encourage contact. (Kruk, 1993)
- The more the X discouraged contact, the more likely the father was to want it. (Kruk, 1993)

## *War (cont.)*



- Xs were “gatekeepers” of access to children.
- Xs limit access as a means of getting back at a former spouse. (Pasley & Minton, 1997)
- This can be expressed by:
  - Denying access to children
  - Not having children ready or accessible for visits.
  - Changing arrangements at the last minute.
  - Confronting or have forcing conflict with father at the time of the access visit.
  - Criticizing the father in front of children.
- Fathers express the ambivalence about visitation by making then breaking engagements with children – mothers most common complaint. (Loewen, 1988)

## War (cont.)

- “Just as women who try to collect child support often give up, fathers who cannot “collect” their visitation rights give up. They just get worn down.” (Anderson-Kheif, 1982, p. 109)
- Many men, weary of conflict, seek to avoid highly emotionally charged exchanges that come when picking up and dropping off children in the presence of Xs.
- Clear association with father involvement with children and quality of relationship with X.



## *Conclusion*

- “These findings suggest that low levels of father involvement in the post divorce family are more accurately, fruitfully, and optimistically viewed as the reactions of fathers to difficult situations.” (Braver & Griffin, 2000, p. 263)

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