STUDY QUESTIONS

Read: Arendell: The Social Self as Gendered: A Masculinist Discourse of Divorce

Cherlin: Going to Extremes: Family Structure, Children's Well-Being, and Social

Science

Amato: The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children

1. On p. 388, Arendell states that "unfamiliar situations" call forth "taken as given identities" and offer opportunities to observe the effects of identity upon behavior. How does observing fathers going through a divorce provide us with such opportunities?

- 2. Compare Arendell's article to the one by Cott that we read at the beginning of term; what are some points of similarity?
- 3. Dramatic social and economic change, according to Arendell, force men (and women) to "confront a crisis in masculinity." Describe.
- 4. On. P. 390 Arendell discusses the concept of *gender strategies*. Describe.
- 5. Arendell speaks of these divorced men as "sharing a masculinist discourse," quoting Bourdieu's definition of discourse as a particular "matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions." This definition is obviously difficult for undergraduate students, but take a stab at it: what do you think it means?
- 6. Arendell found that the majority of her interviewees saw the situation in terms of a "broken family." What are the components of this kind of family? What alternative perspectives did the minority "androgynous" men have? What does "androgynous" mean?
- 7. Arendell cites Bernard's concept of "his" and "hers" marriage: different for men and women with respect to how they conceive of it and how they experience it. Discuss.
- 8. Arendell states that the majority of interviewees felt confident that, compared to their former wife's, their own experiences and perceptions had been "the more valid, reasonable, logical, reliable, or objective ones." (p. 391) Leaving aside the question of whether they were correct, discuss why they had this assessment, including the psychological functions it served.
- 9. A large majority of men said that they had wanted both a version of traditional marriage and companionate marriage. Arendell (p. 392) says this is highly unlikely, if not impossible. Discuss, including how these men avoided confronting the paradox and, if possible, speculate about how their wives participated in the interaction.

- 10. On p. 393 Arendell uses a roundabout way to discuss empathy ("assume the attitude of the other individual as well as calling it out in the other"). Do you think that women are more empathic than men? Why or why not? With what results for marital interaction?
- 11. Describe differences between the divorced mother and father with respect to their children for the majority of interviewees.
- 12. Many of the interviewees spoke of distancing themselves from their children. Why?
- 13. Why, do you suppose, do ambivalent and negative feelings about the former wife remain intense for over a third of the interviewees (p. 397)?
- 14. Discuss how the interviewees employed a "rhetoric of rights."
- 15. How did the androgynous fathers differ from the majority of fathers?
- 16. Compare what Cherlin says about the effect of divorce on children with what Coontz says.
- 17. "Growing up in a single-parent family or a stepfamily is associated with a lower level of well-being and poorer life outcomes than living in a family with two biological parents" (p. 286). What more do we need to know in order to know something useful?
- 18. What is Cherlin's critique of Wallerstein's findings?
- 19. Amato speaks about "the ongoing, contentious debate over the consequences of marital disruption for adults and children" (p. 191). Characterize this debate.
- 20. Why would thinking of divorce as a process rather than event be worthwhile?
- 21. What is "the selection perspective" (p. 196)?
- 22. What is the evidence supporting the perspective on divorce as a crisis? On seeing it in terms of chronic strain?
- 23. What are the major mediators of divorce effects?

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