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for the last 60 years that it's in the child's best interest to remain with the mother. According to Warshak, this assumption doesn't stand up to scientific scrutiny. He and colleague John Santrock have just completed a study that challenges the "motherhood mystique."

The researchers studied 64 elementary-school-age boys and girls: one third in the custody of their mother; one third in the custody of their father; and one third, the controls, living in intact families. The groups were matched for age, age at the time of separation, length of time since the separation, and age and sex of siblings. The children's emotional, social, and personal development, relationships with parents, and reactions to the separation were examined in different ways.

"By and large," Warshak says, "we found similarities. The children in the father-custody homes looked every bit as good as the children in mother-custody homes."

Though none of the children had problems that could be linked specifically to the sex of their custodial parent, the research did suggest two ways in which the parent's sex was significant. One finding had to do with the behavior of the parent who wasn't there. Noncustodial mothers maintained or even improved their relationship with their children. But when the children were in the mother's custody, the father's visits tended to become increasingly infrequent, and his relationship with the children consequently declined.

The most provocative finding: Although men and women made equally good parents for the groups as a whole, fathers seemed to make better parents for the boys, mothers for the girls. The kids living with same-sex parents had more self-esteem and were more mature and possibly happier than children living with parents of the opposite sex.

—Leah Wallach

MEN MAKE GOOD PARENTS

"Most couples devote less time to deciding custody than to deciding how to divide up their furniture," psychologist Richard Warshak says. "They just automatically opt for the mother." The courts, too, have assumed



Divorced men make good custodial parents, according to one study, and may actually be better than their ex-mates at raising boys.