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EXPLORING THE MEMORIES AND WELL-BEING OF COLLEGE STUDENTS  
WITH DIVORCED PARENTS

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how individuals interpret their childhood experiences of parental divorce as related to their current adult lives and families. The research questions explored were: 1) What divorce related changes in family life are remembered as stressors by the college students in my sample, whose parents all divorced when the student was under the age of 16? 2) How do college students with divorced parents describe their current family relations and to what extent do they see this as related to their parents' divorce and resulting changes in family life? 3) How do college students with divorced parents describe their current beliefs about romantic relationships and to what extent do they see this as related to their parents' divorce and resulting changes in family life? I conducted interviews with ten undergraduate students at The Pennsylvania State University whose parents divorced before they turned age 16. This was an exploratory study using qualitative data and the results were analyzed by transcribing and coding each interview and looking for patterns among them. Previous research suggests that divorce may create significant turmoil for children. Still, my respondents varied greatly in the way they felt certain stressors affected their well-being in the long-term. Several themes were evident though, including the loss of a relationship with one's father, the rise of mothers as the sole authority figure, feelings of being in the middle of parental conflict, stress rooted in stepfamily formation and moving homes, changes in current family relations, and feelings of one's ability to form their own romantic relationships. My findings are discussed with the aim of advancing our understanding of adult children's memories of the divorce process and their perceptions of how this event influence their adult lives.

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## Chapter 1

### Literature Review

The topic of children of divorce is important because divorce is often an early crisis in many children's lives (Emery, 2004). Current statistics show that more than 20 percent of first marriages end in divorce within five years and 48 percent of marriages dissolve within 20 years (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, and Mosher, 2012). These rates combined with various previous studies showing that divorce affects children's adjustment in the long-term, indicate the importance of this topic (Lansford, 2009). Long-term consequences that are associated with the process of marital dissolution can increase the risk of behavioral, emotional, and interpersonal problems among children (Amato, 2000; Emery, 2004; Wallerstein, 1989). The family is the first basic experience that children have and the change in family structure may cause children to feel alone and very frightened about their present and future (Wallerstein, 1989). Along with believing that they would be different people if their parents hadn't divorced, most children report painful memories and ongoing worries related to their parents' divorce (Laumann-Billings and Emery, 2000). Stressors such as changes in family life can affect children of divorce in their adult lives through effects on their adjustment to new family relations and current beliefs about romantic relationships (Amato, 2000; Emery, 2004).

In this research study I aim to explore college-aged adults' recollections of these stressors and how they think divorce-related stressors are related to their well-being. For college students, the passage of time, from their childhood, when the divorce occurred, to young adulthood may have provided new insights or offered new interpretations of divorce related events and their effects (Graham, 2013). Further, college students seem to

be rarely the focus on research on the effects of divorce because younger children are seen as vulnerable and in need of a lot of support (Laumann-Billings and Emery, 2000). Studying college-aged adults about the effects they perceived their parents' divorce as having on them is important because they stand on the cusp of childhood and adulthood and will soon form families of their own. Understanding how they interpret a significant childhood family event like divorce can provide important insights into how this experience can have long-term influence on their beliefs and decisions. Amato notes, "Focusing on the average effects of divorce masks the substantial degree of variability that exists in people's adjustment" (Amato, 2010). I want to explore this variability. In-depth interviews and qualitative methods helped me do this.

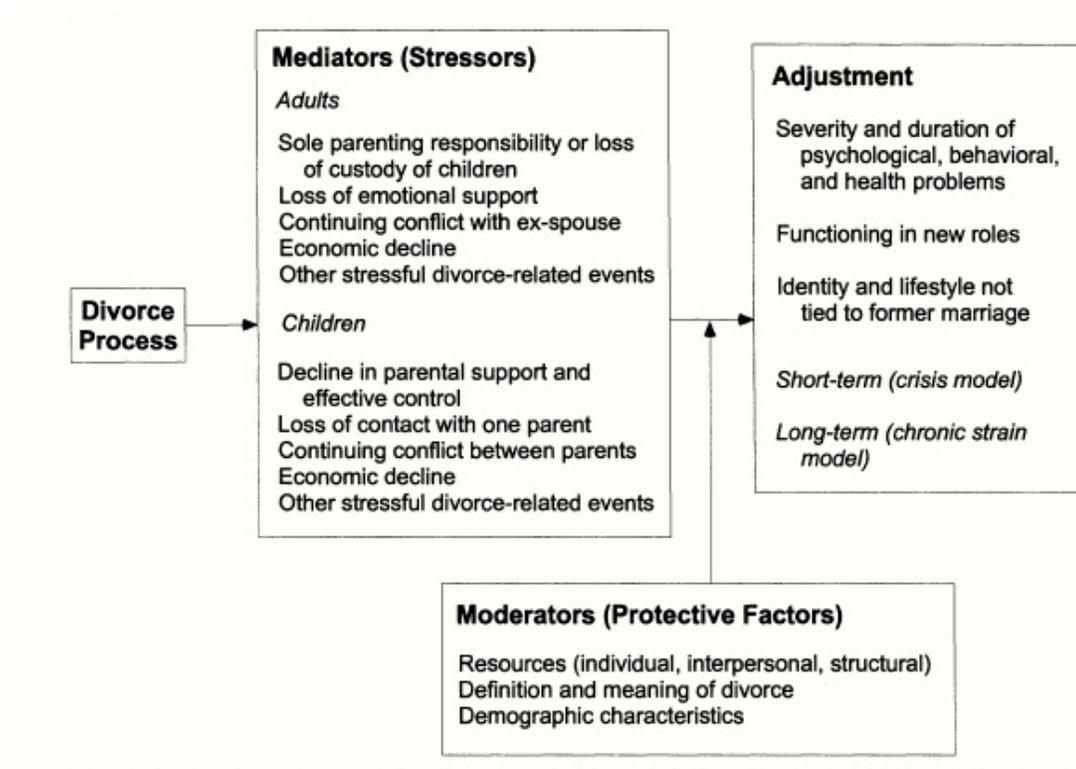
Three research questions are the focus of this project. The research questions were: 1) What divorce related changes in family life are remembered as stressors by the college students in my sample, whose parents all divorced when the student was under the age of 16? 2) How do college students with divorced parents describe their current family relations and to what extent do they see this as related to their parents' divorce and resulting changes in family life? 3) How do college students with divorced parents describe their current beliefs about romantic relationships and to what extent do they see this as related to their parents' divorce and resulting changes in family life? To explore these questions I was guided by the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective (Amato, 2000) and I designed a qualitative study in which I conducted interviews with ten undergraduate students at the Pennsylvania State University whose parents divorced before they were age 16.

**Theory: The Divorce, Stress, Adjustment Perspective**

My research uses the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective (Amato, 2000). An important feature of this perspective is that it treats divorce and adjustment to life after divorce as a process. According to this perspective, divorce is a part of the process of marital dissolution which begins with conflict in a marriage and lasts until the lasts beyond the last legal battle (Amato, 2010). This perspective assumes that divorce is a stressful experience to which both children and adults must adjust and that they have different resources to help them do so. Figure 1 illustrates the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective (Amato, 2000). As displayed in Figure 1, past research shows that the process of parents' discord and the dissolution of their marriage may set in motion a series of stressors that may affect children's adjustment. Stressors related to divorce are different for the parents than for the children but the adjustment and moderating factors are similar for both groups. For example, some stressors for adults can include becoming the sole parent, loss of custody, loss of emotional support, continuing conflict with ex-spouse, economic decline, and other stressful events related to divorce. For children, stressors may include a decline in parents' support and control, loss of contact with a parent, continuing conflict between parents, economic decline, and other divorce-related stressors. Children's successful adjustment is dependent on the extent to which they experienced divorce-related events, the presence of psychological, behavioral, and health problems, their ability to function in new family and school roles, and their development of a new identity and lifestyle that is no longer tied to their parents' former marriage (Amato, 2000; Kitson, 1992; Kitson & Morgan, 1990). The severity and duration of the outcomes related to divorce-related stressors vary for each individual based on

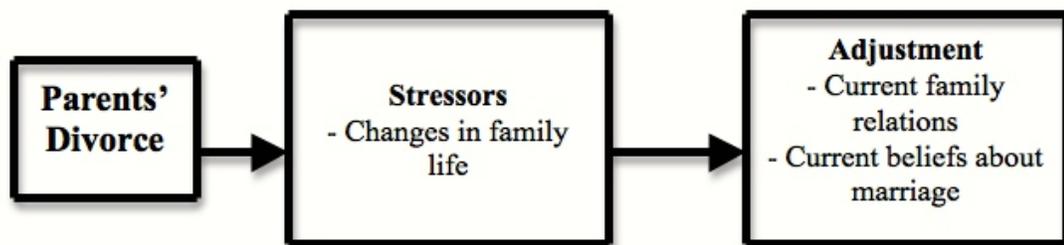
moderating or protective factors. Some examples of moderating or protective factors include, individual, structural, and interpersonal resources, the definition and meaning of divorce, and demographic characteristics. As Figure 1 indicates, the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective can be used to consider adjustment in the short term, as a crisis model, and in the long-term as a chronic strain model. I will be focusing on long-term well-being as it relates to adult children's perceptions.

Figure 1: Theoretical Background: The Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective



In the current project, I examine one part of the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective (Amato, 2000). Figure 2 provides a heuristic model of the current project which focuses on memories of divorce-related changes in family life and connections to current family relations and thoughts of the future.

Figure 2: College Students with Divorced Parents: Recollections of Stressors and Current Well-Being



### **Divorce Related Stressors**

Previous research identifies many potential divorce related stressors for children. For example, changes in parent-child relationships (Thompson & Amato, 1999) and divorce related events such as remarriage, moving, and changing schools (Amato, 2010) were found to be stressful for children experiencing parental divorce. Regarding parent child relationships, several studies indicate that divorced parents are unable to invest as much time in a relationship with their children and are thus less supportive (Amato, 2000), provide less supervision (Thompson & Amato, 1999), and engage in more conflict with their children (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Thompson et al. 1992). Parenting is viewed as having a great impact on children's adjustment and their ability to handle future problems (Cummings, Davies and Campbell, 2002). For example, parents

who are depressed or in ongoing conflict with an ex-spouse as a result of the divorce are unable to commit as much time to their children and thus may offer less effective parenting. This is related to a greater number of social, academic, and psychological adjustment issues in children. (Staal, 2001; Silitsky, 1996). However, not all research reports that children lose consistent support of parents as some parents build a more stable environment for their children post divorce than during marriage (Staal, 2001). If a parent is under stress, this stress may be transmitted to the child, most often in cases of single mothers to adolescent children. Research showed that “mothers' immediate anxiety and anger were related to subsequent anxiety and anger in adolescents” (Larson and Gillman, 1999). Previous research shows that consistent and effective discipline may aid children's coping and help them feel like their environment is more predictable (Kliewer, Sandler, Wolchik, 1994). Changes in parent-child relations may leave children feeling torn between their mother and father's households and the expectation of children to take a side with one parent during the divorce puts stress on the child (Amato, 2010). There is evidence showing that children of divorce lose contact with their fathers (Thompson & Amato, 1999). However, other research shows that some children of divorce establish better relationships with their fathers post-divorce. Research conducted by Constance Ahrons found that, while children's new families of stepparents and half-siblings may look different than other families, the majority feel connected to their family members (Ahrons, 1994). In terms of relationships with mothers, research has shown that offspring, especially daughters, may develop a closer relationship with their mother if she receives full custody (Arditti, 1999).

Parental remarriage is another important part of post-divorce life. Research on the effects of remarriage on children of divorce show mixed results (Amato, 2010). In some cases children in stepfamilies were worse off. According to Dunn's (2002) research, children in stepfamilies are more likely to have adjustment problems because of family conflicts, parental mental health, economic and social stress, family transitions, and parental life-course patterns. The impact of these issues is mediated through the parent-child relationship (Dunn, 2002). However, in other situations, parental remarriage meant fewer interpersonal problems and less depression in children (Aseltine, 1996). In fact, mothers who never remarried may have children with more interpersonal problems (Bolgar et al., 1995). Research shows that the number of life transitions such as divorce, moving, and parental remarriage to which children are exposed helps predict their positive or negative outcomes (Aseltine, 1996). One study found that adolescent adjustment was negatively related to the display of anger or physical abuse between parents before and after they divorced, as well as to the number of stressful life events the child experiences post-divorce (Silitsky, 1996).

Moving neighborhoods and changing schools can be a very influential stressor on children (Amato & Booth, 1997). Negative effects of moving are especially prevalent when the child moves into a poorer neighborhood due to loss of household income as a result of the divorce (Mednick et al. 1990). Previous research shows that growing up in a household without both biological parents makes children worse off (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). McLanahan & Sandefur's (1994) study found that divorce can diminish children's well-being particularly because of declines in income, parental involvement, and access to community resources, all related to living in a single-parent household. It

was also found that children whose parents live apart are twice as likely to drop out of high school as those in two-parent families (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Similarly, a study that focused on custody arrangements found that children fared better under joint physical custody as opposed to sole mother or father custody (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbush, 1996).

It is important to note that not all divorce related events may have a negative effect on children. Divorce can lead to many stressful events but also cause children to build new, healthy relationships, and provide an opportunity for positive growth (Amato, 2010). I let these previous findings guide my research and my first research question, “What divorce related changes in family life are remembered as stressors by the college students in my sample, whose parents all divorced when the student was under the age of 16?”

### **Adult Children’s Adjustment Post-Divorce**

As shown in Figure 2, I focused on two aspects of current students’ well-being that are important in previous research and that may especially link to divorce related changes in family life (Amato, 2000). These aspects are current family relations (Amato, 2000) and current beliefs about romantic relationships (Emery, 2004).

Current Family Relations. Research indicates that interparental conflict in childhood interferes with respondents’ attachment to their parents and is related to problems in children’s psychological adjustment such as anxiety and depression (Thompson & Amato, 1999). Divorce increases children’s risk that they will experience problems with anger, disobedience, and violation of rules (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). Research has also found that continuing problems and conflicts in parent child

relationships explain many children's psychological problems post-divorce (Emery, 2004). Conflict between parents after divorce is a consistent predictor of poor outcomes among children, according to research (Hetherington, 1999; Silitsky, 1996). These poor outcomes could be shown through behavior problems among children and/or attachment issues from children to their parent(s) (Davies & Cummings, 1994). One way troubled family relationships may be evident is in how 'big events' are handled or experienced (Amato, 2010). The potential for conflict among family members, especially parents, at important life events such as graduations and weddings are a concern for many adult children with divorced parents (Amato, 2010). The duration and difficulty of the divorce-related transitions depends on how chaotic the parents make it. For example, parents who minimize legal battles can better manage the stress they put on their children (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). Children of divorce who stay in touch with both parents may have a difficult time "traveling between the two worlds" of their parents' new lives, meaning that they struggle to maintain good relationships with both parents simultaneously (Staal, 2001). In my interviews I pay particular attention to participants' description of current family relations and how they understand these as being related, or not related, to their parents' divorce. The second research question guiding my research is, "How do college students with divorced parents describe their current family relations and to what extent do they see this as related to their parents' divorce and resulting changes in family life?"

Current Beliefs about Romantic Relationships. Previous research shows that children who were exposed to parental divorce might have difficulties forming stable, satisfying romantic relationships as young adults (Amato, 2000). Amato's research also

draws attention to an intergenerational transmission of divorce; an increased risk of offspring divorce when wives or both spouses have experienced parental marital dissolution (Amato, 1996). “Children who grew up as witnesses to their parents’ divorce may exhibit behaviors that interfere with the maintenance of mutually rewarding romantic relationships and may be more open to divorce themselves, expecting their relationships to fail” (Amato, 1996). Wallerstein (1989) conducted extensive qualitative research on this topic and found that children of divorce often lack a template for enduring romantic relationships. Her research showed that anxiety from children’s parents’ divorce could cause offspring to think that relationships are untrustworthy, fear rejection and betrayal, and that they may carry these feelings over into the families they create for themselves (Wallerstein, 1989). Children reflect back on their parents’ relationship as they grow into adults and attempt to forge their own romantic and familial relationships. Children whose parents’ divorced often realize that they struggle when they attempt to find intimacy with their primary partner (Staal, 2001). Staal (2001), argues that divorced parents may not leave a healthy “emotional blueprint” for their children and, because of this, their children are left to build their adult lives and romantic relationships without a solid template for love. In my interviews I explore participants’ hopes for future love and intimate relationships and whether they see these as connected to divorce related events in their childhood. The third research question guiding my research is, “How do college students with divorced parents describe their current beliefs about romantic relationships and to what extent do they see this as related to their parents’ divorce and resulting changes in family life?”

## **Research Questions**

In summary, to try to understand how individuals interpret their experience of divorce during childhood in relation to their current family life, I conducted ten in-depth interviews to explore college students' recollections of divorce related stressors in their childhood and whether they connect these stressors with current experiences of family relationships and hopes for future relationships.

My three guiding research questions are:

- 1) What divorce related changes in family life are remembered as stressors by the college students in my sample, whose parents all divorced when the student was under the age of 16?
- 2) How do college students with divorced parents describe their current family relations and to what extent do they see this as related to their parents' divorce and resulting changes in family life?
- 3) How do college students with divorced parents describe their current beliefs about romantic relationships and to what extent do they see this as related to their parents' divorce and resulting changes in family life?

## **Chapter 2**

### **Methods**

#### **Sample**

In order to examine the long-term effects of divorce of children, I planned and conducted an exploratory research study. This study was approved by the Pennsylvania State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), thus meeting both Penn State and national criteria for ethically appropriate research. The data for this study came from in-depth personal interviews conducted with college students. All ten respondents were Pennsylvania State University undergraduate students between the ages of 18-22. Interviews were conducted during the spring semester (January-February) of the year 2014. Students were recruited from two courses (Criminology 453: "Women in the Criminal Justice System" and Sociology 030: "Sociology of the Family") and were invited to participate in this study if they fit the criteria that their parents were divorced before they turned age 16 (see recruitment email in Appendix A). Students who volunteered to participate in my study received extra credit from their professor for doing so. Six females and four males were interviewed to total a ten-person sample. This sample consisted of a non-probability convenience sample which means that my findings cannot be generalized to a larger population of students but the ideas here may be useful in guiding future research with larger more generalizable samples. As required by the Penn State IRB, consent was obtained verbally, before beginning the interview.

#### **Justification of Sample**

Most of the research on children of divorce is conducted on younger children or older adults (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). When conducting my own research, I

did not find much research on college students whose parents had divorced so I decided to add to this area of the research. I believe that college students' memories surrounding divorce and their opinions on this topic are especially insightful because they are in a different life course stage than young children. They are entering early adulthood and have more independence of mind and action than younger students. For example, they are "away at school" and have the ability to make decisions for themselves regarding which parents' house they go "home" to on breaks and holidays. Their decisions are their own; they are over age 18 and not restricted by custody arrangements. This unique life course position is where effects of divorce on their adult life may start to be manifested (Staal, 2001). They have witnessed relationships change and see how this influences and affects them. Also, college students have the benefits of reflection on their parents' divorce. They have moved away from the divorce experience and the households where it is constantly surrounding them. Although this could be seen as a downside in terms of memory recall, I believe it is helpful in that they have perspective on their situation and its consequences on their current lives.

### **Interview Procedure**

To explore my research questions, students were asked a series of open-ended questions in an in-depth personal interview format. The in-depth interview focuses on exploring the meanings that experiences hold for the person being interviewed. It is effective for seeing how individuals understand their own experiences (Warren and Karner, 2010). Each student was interviewed alone and the interviews were between 45-80 minutes in length. I used an interview guide of core questions based on the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective to guide the interviews. This interview guide is located in

Appendix B. The questions began with introductory demographic information and then asked about details of stressors participants may have experienced around the time of their parents' divorce and how they view their current family relations and future possibilities. All questions were aimed at understanding participants' memories of the changes in family life as stressors and how these participants thought stressors may have been related to their current experiences.

In order to keep students' identities confidential, I recorded the interviews with numbers 1-10 instead of the students' names. These identities were listed on the transcribed interviews. Each interview was recorded using the computer application "Garage Band" and the students had given their verbal consent and were made aware of the recording prior to the beginning of the interview. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using open coding and constant comparative method.

To explore stressors my participants may have experienced, I asked about a variety of divorce related events that previous research has shown affect children's well being. These included, changes in parents' authority over them (Amato, 2010), changes in their parents' involvement in their lives (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), changes in the closeness between them and either parent (Ahrns, 1994), and if they were pushed to take a parents' side (Thompson & Amato, 1999). In addition, I asked about more concrete divorce related changes such as if participants' parents remarried, if the participant had/has stepsiblings (Dunn, 2002), if their family moved or if they had to change schools around the time of the divorce (Aseltine, 1996) and, if so, how they experienced these transitions.

To explore participants' current feelings about family relationships, I asked them about a variety of aspects of their interactions with and feelings about family members today. I started by inquiring about how they think their parents' divorce has affected their relationship with both parents individually (Thompson & Amato, 1999). I also asked about current conflict with and between their parents (Hetherington, 1999), if their parents involve them in the parents' current relationship such as by sharing negative or positive feelings that they have (Silitsky, 1996), and, if they trust, feel close to, and respect their parents (Emery, 2004). I asked questions about how often they see their father and mother, how much time they spend at each parents' house, and how they split up this time (Staal, 2001). Next, I inquired about how participants feel about their parents coming in contact at big life events such as participants' graduation or wedding (Amato, 2010).

To explore participants' feelings about forming romantic relationships of their own I inquired about how they think their parents' divorce has affected their ability to form and maintain romantic relationships. I asked questions about whether they are more comfortable in or out of a romantic relationship, if they plan to get married and/or have children, how they feel about divorce, and if they think parents should stay in a marriage for the sake of their children (Laumann-Billings and Emery, 2000; Emery, 2004).

### **Qualitative Analysis**

I chose to conduct a qualitative study because I value the recollections of people's experiences and wanted to hear their stories. Qualitative research is good for exploring the complex meanings of events and experiences for people and getting at the processes of interpretation and lived experiences in ways that surveys cannot. The qualitative

research method of interviewing respects the ambiguity of each person's experience and appreciates that, "Stories allow for the roundness of characters and personalities, and a wide range of emotions. People speak to how they got through obstacles in their lives and relationships" (Staal, 2001). My research aims to understand the extent to which respondents believe that their parents' divorce had important effects on them.

I began analyzing my data with the process of open coding. This helped me begin to identify analytic patterns and themes in my sample. The process of open coding is conducted by looking at a portion of text, in this case an interview, reading and rereading passages within it, and identifying the key concepts. This process is very unstructured and allows the researcher to be open and see what arises from the data (Warren & Karner, 2005). My concepts of interest were developed based on the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective and my codes were suggested by this theory. Codes that emerged within the stressors section of my research included the loss of a relationship with fathers, the rise of mothers as the sole authority figure, respondents feeling as though their parents made them feel in middle of parental conflicts, and stress rooted in the formation of stepfamilies and moving homes. Codes that emerged within the current adult well-being section of my research included mixed effects of divorce on current family relations and interactions, as well as mixed effects of divorce on respondents' current views about their ability to form romantic relationships of their own.

In open coding, pieces of text or data can be given more than one code and reflect numerous different concepts. In this case, a statement about conflict with a stepparent could be related to codes about parental remarriage, conflict with parents, and conflict between parents.

I also made use of the constant comparative method where observations from the interviews are compared with one another and across cases (Warren & Karner, 2005). This cross-case analysis allowed me to identify important themes based on the frequency with which they emerged. I established my themes inductively and discovered patterns from the ground up by letting the frequency of participants' responses determine what I analyzed. Because I analyzed my data this way, I was able to see relationships among concepts emerge and then form relating themes. This was especially helpful because, as often happens in this type of research study, some of the concepts that I explored ended up being mentioned less frequently, meaning they were less salient for my sample.

## Chapter 3

### Results

The primary focus of this study was to explore how individuals interpret their childhood experiences of divorce as related to their adult lives and families. Specifically, I was interested in memories of stressors around the time of their parents' divorce and current well-being in terms of family relationships.

A close dissection of each interview transcript showed certain repeating themes and findings related to children's recollections of their divorce related experiences. I was also able to recognize that the same divorce related changes were viewed as positive by some and negative by others. The students' stories and related themes are discussed below.

#### **Stressors: Changes in Family Life**

The first part of the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective focuses on understanding the stressors that a child may experience as a result of their parents' divorce (Amato, 2010). To explore these stressors in my sample, I asked respondents about a variety of divorce related events that previous research has shown affect children's well being. I learned that many participants recall a loss of a relationship with their father, their mother as more of an authority figure, a push by either or both parents to take their side, interparental conflict, and a parent moving homes as important changes in family life post divorce. For some these were stressors and for others they were not.

Loss of Contact with Fathers. Respondent 1's father was abusive of her mother, causing not only the divorce but also a significant change in her father's involvement in

her life. Her mother stayed in the marriage for as long as she could because she wanted her daughter (the respondent) to have a relationship with her father despite his abusive behavior. It wasn't until Respondent 1's father choked her (the respondent) that her mother decided to leave and divorce him. Post-divorce, Respondent 1's father tried to stay involved in her life but his history of abuse caused constant issues in their daughter-father relationship. Respondent 6 completely lost contact with her father and had to seek counseling as a result. She developed an eating disorder which she believes was in response to comments her father would make about her weight and now she cannot hear his voice without "losing it". Through therapy Respondent 6 was urged to reconcile her relationship with her father as tell him how his comments had affected her. When she did this, he reportedly laughed in her face and refused to apologize, a confrontation that Respondent 6 doesn't see herself ever overcoming.

Mothers as Sole Authority Figure. Regarding change in parent-child relations, Respondent 1 stated, "My mother was the main authoritarian because she was the one who was raising me after the divorce" and "He wasn't an actual father, he was more like, 'I'm just going to take you out and have fun'". Respondent 9's father was never the authority figure because she wasn't able to see her father as much after the divorce because he moved further away and worked more often. Today, her father plays more the role of a friend in her life, not a parental one like her mother. Respondent 10's father became more involved in her life after the divorce and also played the fun parent role by "picking me up on Fridays in his convertible" and spoiling her. She reported that this was great at the time but caused her mother to resent her father because he could give her presents and satisfaction that her mother could not. Respondent 10 realizes now that her

father was supplying “temporary happiness” and her mother is the more consistently supportive parent. Respondent 7 noted that he was allowed do different things at different houses. For example, his father let him have sleepovers and drink alcohol with his friends but his mother did not allow either so she was seen as more of a disciplinarian whose house had more rules. Respondent 2 reported a loss of parental authority on both sides and stated, “After they separated they both loosened up with their parenting a lot and I had more freedom. It was their way of trying to figure out how to start their own individual lives as single people get over their conflicts with each other.” In terms of involvement in his life, Respondent 5 stated that his father always tried to make things up to him and, even though he did not realize it at the time, he is very appreciate of that effort now because he would not have a close relationship with his father now if it wasn’t for those initial efforts. Both Respondent 3 and 8’s parents divorced when they were about 1 year old and their parents’ involvement in their lives was not affected. Both respondents had joint custody arrangements and little conflict between their parents. Respondent 3 stated that, “My father was the typical father, he supported my athletics and my mother was more supportive of my emotional side” while Respondent 8 said, “My father is more strict and more of a provider while my mother is the fun, more loving parent.”

Feeling in the Middle. Several respondents reported feeling “in the middle” of their parents, an experience they all recalled as stressful. Parents who put children in the middle and tried to force the child to take one parents’ side often influenced current parent-adult child relations. Respondent 1 provided evidence of this. She stated that her mother and father often talk badly about each other and question her relationship and

closeness with the other. She explained that her father will say “Why do you listen to your mother? She hates me and is out to get me” while her mother claims she is “just thinking about your best interests” and thinks her father is only talking to her because he wants to lessen child support payments or because it is convenient for him. Respondent 1 also noted that she can't talk to one parent about the other because, “I will talk to her about what I do with him and how I am excited but to her it is like I am betraying her in some way. She starts crying and questioning if I like being with him more”. Respondent 1 notes this constant fight between her parents asking her to taking sides as a major stressor. Respondent 6, who acquired an eating disorder that she attributes to comments her father made, said she felt pushed to take her mother's side as a child but now that her father has done things to hurt her personally she sees why her mother feels so negatively about her father, and now she agrees. Her mother always said that her father was not a good person to have in her life but it took her trying and failing to maintain a relationship with him for her to understand her mother's advice.

Some respondents' parents opened up to their children with details about the divorce. Respondent 2 stated that his mother would share with him her frustrations about the divorce related conflicts she had with his father and this caused him to open up to and respect her more. Respondent 2's mother was honest about his father's adultery, manic behaviors, and aggressive nature causing the respondent to take notice of these traits and side more with his mother. In his words, “She talked to me a lot about what frustrated her about their marriage. It wasn't bitching it was more venting and that made me open up to her.” He described his family life as “traumatic” and in “constant turmoil” because of the divorce stating that the conflict between his parents made him really angry when he was

17-18 years old. This angry stage was tied to depression and an internalization of his feelings about the conflict between his parents and the issues it was constantly causing in his life. Respondent 7's father was very open with his son about the struggles he faced as a result of the divorce. Because of this openness, Respondent 7 was biased towards his father, blamed his mother for the divorce and resulting changes in his life as well as for his father's pain.

Respondents who did not witness conflict between their parents and were not pushed to take one parents' side over the other had a much more positive adjustment experience in the long term. Respondent 9 never saw her parents fight or argue, something she now calls a "big blessing". Her mother always made sure she was able to have a good relationship with her father and she believes that that is why they are able to have a civil family life today. Specifically, Respondent 9 spoke about the lack of a custody battle and the openness of the situation as helpful aids to her adjustment and overall well-being. Similarly, Respondent 8, who described her parents' divorce as "clean" said her parents displayed no hostility after the divorce and are still good friends today. Respondent 5, whose parents never fought prior to the divorce to his knowledge, was able to maintain stable, healthy relationships with both his mother and his father after they divorced. Respondent 10 provided an interesting point in saying, "My parents never really fought in front of me which was nice but, at the same time, I really didn't see the divorce coming."

Formation of Stepfamilies. The majority of my respondents felt the formation of stepfamilies, a common divorce related change in family life, was an important part of their experience (Amato, 2010). Remarriage and relationships with stepparents and

stepsiblings can be positive or negative depending on individuals' situations (Dunn, 2002). Respondent 1's stepfather's involvement in her life was extremely positive. She stated, "[My stepfather] was the main reason why I went to college and the main reason why I did well high school. Remarriage really helped us and having him in my life was great because he is a father figure and he always supports me; financially, emotionally, with everything". Like Respondent 1, Respondent 9 views her mother's remarriage as a key reason why she is who she is today. Her stepfather is the reason why she starting attending church and it is because of him that she is a Christian and her mother became a pastor.

In contrast to such positive influences, Respondent 1's stepsister was a major cause of stress for her and her mother. Despite attempts to make her feel welcome in their family, her stepsister was very cruel to her and because they didn't form a close bond at a young age they haven't been able to reconcile their differences in the present. Similarly, Respondent 2's stepbrother steals from him and this causes him to avoid staying at his father's house, which is a significant problem in his current relationship with his father because he rarely interacts with his father. Respondent 10 said that tension between her mother and her stepmother is still an important cause of stress for her. Her stepmother and mother are in constant competition with each other over who can be a better parent, Respondent 10 said. Her stepmother brought two stepbrothers into her family, one with Down's Syndrome and the other with bipolar disorder, both things that overwhelmed Respondent 10 and created a lot of stress for her. As time has gone on, Respondent 10 has learned to balance all of the aspects of both sides of her family and, as a result, is more easy going when conflicts arise. Respondent 6's father remarried and "remade his

life without me”, she stated. She felt that he loved his stepchildren more than her and he even pointed out things he would buy for them that he would not buy for her.

In contrast to more negative experiences, Respondent 8’s believes that her father isn’t even dating because he is afraid to bring someone into her life who he doesn’t know will be there permanently. Respondent 5 didn’t have very strong negative or positive relationships with either stepparent and did not report anything influential enough to affect his well-being in the long term, just stating that he was happy to see both of his parents happy with their current spouses.

Moving Homes. When a parent moved after the divorce, respondents reported various negative effects for themselves. To Respondents 1 and 4, their fathers moving across the country (from Pennsylvania to California and Missouri respectively) was an ongoing stressor in their post-divorce lives. Respondent 4’s father moved to Arizona when she was a child and she was only able to see him twice a year, thus drastically influencing his involvement in her life. She talked at length about the stressor of her father moving to Arizona and stated, “The only really traumatizing thing about the divorce was having to go back and forth. It was really hard and really upsetting. You can’t go back and forth and be emotionally devastated every time. You end up building a callous to it and my father told me that there came a point when I was young where I would just get on the plane and say ‘bye’. That is pretty weird, for a little kid, but I just put up a wall because I couldn’t be that devastated every time or it would have killed me”. Respondent 1’s father moved to Missouri, she felt, to “get away from us”, stopped paying child support, and became irresponsible and hard to communicate with.

Respondent 8’s mother recently moved from Pennsylvania to California to be with her

new husband and this greatly decreased her mother's involvement in her life because she is financially unable to fly to California more than once a year. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade, when Respondent 7's mother moved into a new house in the same town, he remembers telling her he felt like he was "living in a hotel with half of his stuff" and that he hated going back and forth between his parents' homes. In summary I found that parental divorce affects children in that it is related to the loss of relationships with fathers, the rise of mothers as the sole authority figure, respondents feeling as though their parents made them feel in middle of parental conflicts, and stress rooted in the formation of stepfamilies and moving homes.

### **Adult Well-Being: Current Family Relations**

The second part of my research looked at current adjustment issues that children of divorced parents experience (Amato, 2010). I explored how college students with divorced parents describe their current family relations and to what extent they see this as related to their parents' divorce and resulting changes in family life (see Figure 2). To explore participants' adjustment, I asked them about a variety of relationships that could have potentially been affected by the divorce. Previous research suggested that respondents would report more negative or troubled current family relations and these may be associated with the divorce related stressors in family life (Hetherington, 1999). Negative effects reported by respondents included continuing interparental conflicts and animosity towards stepparents while positive effects included healthy, civil relationships between parents and an overall lack of current interparental conflict. I also learned about neutral effects including a minimal amount of interparental conflict and the ability to balance and manage relationships with both parents equally. Current family relations and

divorce related conflict caused future concerns for some but not others; some respondents reported extreme concern over parental contact while others expressed positive feelings about current family interactions. Participants in this study reported that the divorce had both negative and positive effects on the current relations in their family.

Level of Current Interparental Conflict. Respondent 1, who experiences a lot of interparental conflict, said she feels like she cannot talk to either parent without feeling like the other one thinks she is paying more attention to them. She also stated that the past often comes back and she cannot forget how much her father hurt her and her mother. Her father is the reason why she doesn't make promises unless she knows she can keep them, she said. The conflict related to her parents' divorce also caused her to be closer to, have more respect for and more trust in her mother today. Respondent 6 noted how sad it is that she will never be able to have a relationship with her father, "not even in ten years". She doesn't get along with his new wife and her children and he always chooses them over her. After attending therapy as a result of comments made by her father and trying to rebuild a relationship with him and his new family, he only pushed her further away. She stated, "My mother says that I can't start having a relationship with my father again because he has messed me up so much already he can only hurt me".

Some positive effects that my respondents reported included healthy, civil relationships between parents and an overall lack of current interparental conflict. Respondent 4 says that her parents never tried to pit her against the other, never pointed fingers, and that they get along well to this day. Respondent 9, like Respondent 4, didn't report any major conflict between her parents and respects and trusts them both today, which she sees as a result of her parents' amicable relationship. Similarly, Respondent 5

and 8's parents are civil and conflict between them is never something they are worried about.

Some of the neutral effects that my respondents reported included a minimal amount of interparental conflict and the ability to deal balance and manage relationships with both parents equally. Many of these neutral effects were attributed to the physical distance away from the homes of both of their parents. Respondent 2 reported that the only conflict between his parents now is a result of arguments over his tuition and his siblings' child support. He mentioned that it is much easier to deal with their conflict now that he doesn't live at home because it is "out of sight, out of mind". Respondent 2's relationship with his father also improved when he moved away to college because he is now able to see and talk to his father on his (the respondent's) terms and can thus be more independent of him. Respondent 7, like Respondent 2, says he still has to balance the communication between his parents but "bridging the gap" is easier now that he is away at college. Respondent 10 also said that being away at college makes her feel less torn between her parents although she still has to be the communication link between them.

Concerns About Future Family Interactions. Current family relations and divorce related conflict caused future concerns for some but not others. In most cases, the interaction between respondents and their families changed drastically as a result of divorce. Respondent 1 stated that big events always stress her out and she has worried about whether her father or stepfather will walk her down the aisle. Respondent 10 also expressed concern over her wedding stating, "I hope [my parents] can sit next to each other...or at least sit in the same row." Respondent 6 spoke a lot about what she thinks

her wedding will be like. She stated, “My wedding will be so important to me but I think it will kind of be my way of getting back at him. I will just send him a picture of it and then shut my phone off and go on my honeymoon because that just says, ‘look at this, you missed everything’.”

In contrast to those who feel concerned about future events involving their whole family, some respondents reported positive feelings about current family interactions. Respondent 3 reported feeling happy when his whole family interacts at big events because they get along and don’t cause him any stress when they are all together. Respondent 4 said that she doesn’t worry about big events in her life but that her father, who moved to Arizona after the divorce, is often times more upset than she is about not being able to attend important events like graduation. Respondent 5’s feelings are also neutral; his parents and their new partners interact in a very civil manner at big life events and he is not bothered by their contact. Respondents 9 and 7, whose parents don’t argue or fight, have no problem with their parents coming in contact at big life events. Respondent 9 said that even her extended family (her stepfather and stepsisters from her mother’s remarriage) make a genuine effort to get to know her father, which she appreciates. In summary I found that parental divorce has a mixture of negative and positive effects on current family relations and interactions.

### **Adult Well-Being: Current Beliefs about Romantic Relationships**

My third research question focused on how college students with divorced parents describe their current beliefs about romantic relationships and to what extent they see this as related to their parents’ divorce and resulting changes in family life (see Figure 2). I asked them questions about whether they were more comfortable in or out of a romantic

relationship, if they planned to get married and/or have children, how they feel about divorce, and if they think parents should stay in a marriage for the sake of their children. Previous research suggested that respondents will express fear and anxiety over finding love and intimacy in their own romantic relationships and respondents may relate these beliefs to divorce related family changes (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). I learned that parental divorce had a considerable effect on the way college students view dating, marriage, and divorce in their current lives. Some reported negative effects in that they feel disillusioned or defective, while others feel that their parents' experience has made them more cautious and prepared to create a positive marriage.

Feeling Damaged. Some respondents felt damaged by their parents' divorce. For example, Respondent 10 thinks that her actions in romantic relationship were heavily influenced by her parents' divorce. She stated, "I am so doubtful and more cautious and closed off with boys who I know like me or want to date me. I have attachment issues because there were no warning signs with my parents; I literally woke up one day and they were getting divorced." Conversely, Respondent 3 doesn't want to be in a relationship or get married because he doesn't trust girls. Respondent 6 reports that she is ashamed to tell new guys she is interested in that her parents are divorced because she thinks that they will "think something is wrong with me". She thinks that she is attracted to hard-to-get, emotionally unavailable guys because that is what she looks for, and cannot obtain, in her relationship with her father.

Prepared for the Future. Other respondents have taken their parents' divorce as a cautionary tale and are determined to create a positive marriage for themselves.

Respondent 9's beliefs about marriage and relationships were greatly influenced by her

parents' divorce because her mother and stepfather became her example of a good, loving, healthy marriage; something she hopes to one day have. She attributes their successful marriage to their bond in God and because of this she hopes to build a marriage around a strong Christian foundation. She stated, "The divorce made me realize that I don't want to put my children through what I went through so it just made me more want to make sure that I don't get married for the wrong reasons". Respondent 2 believes that the biggest affect his parents' divorce had on him was showing him how marriage shouldn't be and, as a result, he looks at marriage as a partnership, not as the man as the head of household because that belief is what caused a lot of the conflict between his parents. Respondent 7 said he learned the importance of signing a prenuptial agreement because of how the divorce financially devastated his father. Respondent 1 said that she didn't want to get married originally because she doesn't think it is "everlasting" but now she sees that her current boyfriend isn't like her father so she is comfortable in a committed relationship with him and is now considering marriage. Respondent 4 answered similarly and said she would like to get married one day if the person and time is right while Respondent 8 calls herself a "hopeless romantic" who wants her children to have more of a "wholesome family". In summary I found that parental divorce has a mixture of negative and positive effects on respondents' current views about their ability to form their own romantic relationships.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore how college students interpret their childhood experiences of divorce as related to their adult lives and families. The topic of long-term effects of divorce on children is important because the stressors they experience as a result of the divorce and divorce-related events may affect their well-being for the remainder of their lives. I used the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective (Amato, 2000) (Figure 1) to create research questions that I explored by interviewing ten undergraduate students at The Pennsylvania State University whose parents divorced before they turned age 16. As this was an exploratory study, the results of these interviews were analyzed using qualitative approaches. My results showed how memories of stressors such as changes in family life can affect children of divorce in their adult lives through their connection to new family relations and current beliefs about romantic relationships.

Table 1: Summary of Findings: Research Questions and Key Themes

<b>Research Question 1</b>	“What divorce related changes in family life are remembered as stressors by the college students in my sample, whose parents all divorced when the student was under the age of 16?”
<u>Key Themes</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss of contact with fathers</li> <li>- Mothers as sole authority figure</li> <li>- Feeling in the middle</li> <li>- Formation of stepfamilies</li> <li>- Moving homes</li> </ul>

<b>Research Question 2</b>	“How do college students with divorced parents describe their current family relations and to what extent do they see this as related to their parents’ divorce and resulting changes in family life?”
<u>Key Themes</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Level of continuing interparental conflict</li> <li>- Concerns about future family interactions</li> </ul>
<b>Research Question 3</b>	“How do college students with divorced parents describe their current beliefs about romantic relationships and to what extent do they see this as related to their parents’ divorce and resulting changes in family life?”
<u>Key Themes</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feeling damaged</li> <li>- Prepared for the future</li> </ul>

## **Discussion**

Overall, my research suggests several themes regarding stressors and adjustment of participants. My respondents varied greatly in the way certain stressors affected their well-being in the long-term. From my first research question I learned that participants recall a loss of a relationship with their father, their mother as more of an authority figure, a push by either or both parents to take their side, interparental conflict, and a parent moving homes as potentially stressful changes in family life post divorce. Interestingly, economic effects were never brought up as a major stressor from the child’s point of view. This may mean that my participants come from advantaged backgrounds or perhaps that their parents worked to keep economic problems out of their sight.

Regarding research question two I learned about negative, positive, and neutral effects of parental divorce on children’s current well-being. Negative effects reported by respondents included continuing interparental conflicts and animosity towards

stepparents while positive effects were healthy, civil relationships between parents and an overall lack of current interparental conflict. Neutral effects included a minimal amount of interparental conflict and the ability to balance and manage relationships with both parents equally. My research showed that current family relations and divorce related conflict caused future concerns for some but not others. Some respondents reported extreme concern over parental contact while others expressed positive feelings about current family interactions.

The third research question showed that parental divorce had a considerable effect on the way college students whose parents are divorced view dating, marriage, and divorce in their current lives. These effects are not necessarily positive or negative; most respondents are just more aware of what makes up a “bad” or “good” marriage and have plans for how they will avoid divorce in their own lives. Many of my respondents answers were similar to those in Staal’s (2001) research in that they reported anxiety over not growing up with a good example of a loving, healthy romantic relationship or marriage. Overall, I learned that no one event was stressful for every respondent. Each divorce-related stressor was seen as positive, negative, or neutral to individual respondents and no overarching claims about the nature of an event and its long-term effects could be made.

I conducted interviews because I wanted to give respondents the chance to talk about any stressors that were part of their own unique experience. My results are a display of individuals’ characters, emotions, and stories of how their parents’ divorce formed them into who they are and what their family life is like today. As each interview subject explains his own path, readers are able to appreciate the variety of perspectives

that divorced children develop (Staal, 2001). The ambiguity and variability of my results show the personal side to my research and allows the reader to truly understand how the respondent believes that their well-being was affected by their parents' divorce.

There are multiple limitations to this research study. One limitation is the way recruitment was conducted. Students were recruited from a limited pool of one sociology course and one criminology course and students were offered extra credit which may have skewed the participants from an academic standpoint. Because participation in the survey was completely voluntary, the participants may have been people who felt particularly comfortable talking about divorce or felt strongly about their situation. The small sample size is another limitation. I interviewed ten people, four men and six women. A larger sample would have allowed me to have a deeper understanding of patterns and potential gender differences and possibly help generate important new theory or concepts. The goal of qualitative research is to try to develop new concepts and propositions; in this case about processes and experiences within the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective (Amato, 2000). Developing generalizable findings is not a goal of this work, but it is my hope that the ideas presented may be useful in guiding future research.

There are also limitations of this study because of the use of recall. I asked participants if they saw connections between parental divorce and their lives today however they were remembering stressors from several years in the past. Their memories may be faulty. An advantage of a qualitative approach is being able to explore those interpretations. I ideally would have been able to interview some college students who did not experience parental divorce so I could have made comparisons between the two

groups and their life experiences. It is possible that college students whose parents are still married have experienced the same things that respondents in my sample whose parents divorced did.

This study makes some contributions to our understanding of the study of divorce and its affects on children who experience it. How college students tell their story, what they remember, and their individual interpretations of their experiences may be influencing their future choices. The exploration into college students' own understanding is thought provoking. College students are less frequently found in studies of the effects of divorce, yet they are at a unique life stage where they have just moved from their parents' home, away from potential ongoing familial conflict, and they are on their way to forming their own romantic relationships which may become families of their own. What I learned from the present research is that adult children of divorce often remember the loss of a relationship with their father, the rise of their mother as the sole authority figure, feelings of being in the middle of parental conflict, and stress rooted in stepfamily formation and moving homes. In terms of current well-being, adult children report both positive and negative changes in family relations and interactions and both positive and negative feelings about their ability to form their own romantic relationships.

What I have tried to contribute through this research is related to Staal's (2001) idea, "Those of us who have lived through divorce can't possibly squeeze the light and shadow of our lives into a model. We long for stories, not theory. We crave a forum to share our experiences, not open them up for judgment." I tried to provide that kind of a forum for my participants.

## Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Hey everyone!

My name is Jessie Maynor and I am writing to invite you to participate in my research. I am a Senior and a Schreyer Honors College student and I took Dr. Silver's Soc 30 class last year! I am currently doing research for my thesis. My topic is the long-term effects of divorce on adult children for example, their emotional well-being, feelings toward parents, financial and relationship stressors, and attitudes toward relationships.

To learn about this I am interviewing Penn State students whose parents were divorced before they were age 16. The interviews are private and take about an hour. All responses are completely confidential and only I will know your name which I will keep anonymous.

If you choose to participate, you will receive your extra credit point for this class.

If your parents divorced before you were age 16 and you would like to contribute to my research or have any questions about it, please email me at [jlm6010@psu.edu](mailto:jlm6010@psu.edu) by Feb 10 to schedule an interview!

Thank you!

Jessica Maynor

The Pennsylvania State University 2014  
Schreyer Honors College  
Crime, Law, and Justice, B.A.  
Member, Penn State Lionettes Dance Team  
President, Penn State Athletes Take Action

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

### A. Introduction

- a. Gender:
- b. Race:
- c. Age:
- d. Hometown:
- e. Major:
- f. Career aspirations:

### B. Stressors

- a. Please describe your parents' divorce in as much detail as you feel comfortable.
  - i. How old were you at the time of your parents' divorce?
  - ii. What was the reason for your parents' divorce?
- b. Change in Parent-Child Relations
  - i. Did the divorce cause any changes in your parents' authority (i.e. rule making, enforcing) over you?
  - ii. Did the divorce cause any changes in your parents' involvement (i.e. presence, support) in your life?
  - iii. Were you pushed to take one parents' "side"?
  - iv. Did the closeness between you and your parents change as a result of the divorce?
- c. Conflict Between and With Parents
  - i. What was the divorce like?
    1. For you, your mother, and your father individually.
  - ii. How did you feel about the divorce?
  - iii. Were there custody arrangements? If so, what were they?
    1. How did the custody arrangements affect you and your parents?
  - iv. How was the interaction between your parents at the time of the divorce. Has it changed?
    1. Is it better or worse?
  - v. From your perspective, what was the conflict between your parents a result of? (i.e. finances, adultery, etc.)
  - vi. How did you feel about the conflict between your parents?
- d. Economic Effects
  - i. Did the finances of either or both parents change?
    1. Has this affected you?
    2. Did your standard of living change as a result of your parents' divorce?
    3. Did you feel like finances were a cause of stress for you or your parents after your parents' divorce?
- e. Stressful Divorce Related Events
  - i. Are either of your parents remarried?

1. If yes, when?
2. If yes, how has it affected you?
3. If yes, how has that affected your relationship with both parents?
4. If yes, do you have stepsiblings?
- ii. Did the divorce cause you to move and/or change schools?
  1. If yes, how was that transition?
- iii. How did you feel about others knowing about your parents' divorce (i.e. friends, teachers, extended family, etc.)?

### C. Adjustment

#### a. Current Family Relations

- i. How has your parents' divorce and the relationship between your parents now affected you?
- ii. Has your parents' divorce and the relationship between your parents now affected your relationship the other parent?
- iii. Has your parents' divorce affected your relationship with your extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. on either side)?
- iv. What is the cause of conflict between your parents now, if there is any?
- v. How do you feel about your parents' current level of relationship? (i.e. conflict, closeness, communication, etc.)
- vi. Do your parents involve you in their relationship today?
- vii. Do you trust both of your parents?
- viii. Do you feel closer to, or more respect for, one parent more than the other?

#### b. Familial Interactions

- i. When, where, how often, and how easy is the contact between you and your mother?
- ii. When, where, how often, and how easy is the contact between you and your father?
- iii. How much time do you spend at each parents' house?
  1. How do you split up time between your parents?
- iv. Do you feel more at home in one parents' house versus the other?
- v. Do you feel like you can be yourself around your mother and father separately?
- vi. How do you feel about your parents coming in contact at big life events? (i.e. graduations, weddings, holiday, etc.)
  1. How do you feel about how these important events are handled within your family?
  2. How do these interactions affect you?

#### c. Current Beliefs about Marriage

- i. What are your current feelings about and experiences in romantic relationships?
  1. Are you more comfortable in or out of a romantic relationship?

2. Some people don't trust the other sex much while others trust the other sex a lot. Where do you stand?
  - ii. Do you want to get married and/or have children? Why or why not?
  - iii. What do you think is important in a good marriage?
  - iv. How do you feel about divorce?
    1. Would you get a divorce?
    2. Why or why not?
  - v. What are important characteristics of a good parent?
  - vi. Do you think parents should stay in a marriage for the sake of their children?
  - vii. Were your beliefs in marriage and relationships influenced by your parents' divorce?
- d. Psychological Well-Being
- i. How would you describe your childhood before and after your parents' divorce?
    1. Was it better or worse than people whose parents were married?
    2. Do you feel that you had a more difficult childhood than your friends whose parents are still married?
    3. Do you think you would be a different person if your parents hadn't divorced?
  - ii. Do you ever miss both parents being together?
    1. If so, when and why?
  - iii. Do you feel loved by your parents?
  - iv. Are you generally feeling happy?
  - v. How supportive do you feel your family is of you?
  - vi. How would you describe your outlook on your future?
  - vii. Do you feel that, as a child of divorced parents, you are more likely to be divorced?

#### D. Resilience

- a. Helpful Resources
  - i. Have you seen a counselor or psychologist to discuss issues relating to your parents' divorce?
    1. Have either of your parents seen a counselor or psychologist to discuss issues relating to their divorce?
    2. Have you seen a counselor or psychologist to discuss issues relating to your parents' divorce with either parent?
  - ii. What helpful resources do you think helped you cope with your parents' divorce? (i.e. grandparents, staying in same town, etc.)
  - iii. What did your parents do that helped you cope with and adjust to the divorce?

1. Looking back, is there anything you think your parents could have done differently to make your adjustment smoother or easier?

iv. What characteristics of yourself do you think helped you cope? (i.e. you are calm, good at asking for help, etc.)

E. Conclusion

a. Is there anything that I missed that you would like to share or that you feel I should know about you, your experience, or any of the topics we discussed?

b. Do you have any suggestions or comments on the way I conducted the interview and/or the questions I asked?

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## **Jessica Maynor – Academic Vita**

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### **EDUCATION**

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**The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA**      **Expected Graduation: May 2014**  
**Schreyer Honors College**

Major:

- Bachelor of Arts in Crime, Law, and Justice

Minors:

- Human Development and Family Studies
- Sociology
- Disability Studies

**Institute at Palazzo Rucellai – Florence, Italy**      **Summer 2012**

- Studied art history and Italian culture during a six-week study abroad program

### **WORK EXPERIENCE**

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**White & Case LLP, New York, NY – Intern, Knowledge Department**      **June 2013 – August 2013**

- Assisted with the Knowledge Department’s project of redesigning and reorganizing the law firm’s intranet using Microsoft SharePoint
- Participated in organization and design meetings with professional support lawyers, web software designers, and marketing professionals
- Learned about the firm’s more than 20 practice areas, international presence in 41 other offices, and internal management/organization

**Westside Stadium Bar and Grill, State College, PA – Waitress**      **May 2011 – May 2013**

### **HONORS**

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**Penn State Homecoming Student Court**      **September 2013 – October 2013**

- Awarded to five females out of approximately 44,000 students for leadership, community service, academics, and university involvement

**U.S. Navy Supply Corps Foundation Scholarship**      **2010 – 2014**

- Awarded college scholarship for academic performance and extra-curricular involvement

**Paterno Liberal Arts Undergraduate Fellows Program**      **2010 – Present**

- Member of program that recognizes students in ethics, service, leadership, excellence in communication, and international awareness

### **LEADERSHIP AND ACTIVITIES**

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**Penn State Lionettes Dance Team**      **May 2011 – Present**

- One of 27 members of a student-run varsity sports team that trains 20 or more hours per week and performs at university sporting events
- Division 1A National Dance Alliance National Champions 2012, 2013
- Dance Marathon Family Relations Chair, 2011-2012. Managed the relationship between the team and a family whose daughter had cancer
- Merchandise Coordinator, 2012-2014. Designed, ordered, and managed all clothing and uniforms for the team

**Penn State Athletes Take Action**      **August 2012 – Present**

- President of a group of 20 student-athletes who volunteer monthly in local 6<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms to promote awareness of bullying, violence, and abuse and facilitated learning about and reporting bullying and violence at home and at school

**Teaching Assistant for CRIM 467 “Law and Society” Course**      **Spring 2013, Spring 2014**

- Assisted professor in teaching course, developing course materials, course organization, and grading
- Helped students develop analytical, research, and critical-thinking skills

**Athletic Director's Leadership Institute**

**August 2012 – Present**

- Member of a selective institute for student athletes where leadership skills are developed and applied in academics and athletics

**Parmi Nous Senior Honor and Tradition Society**

**2013 – Present**

- One of 40 students selected annually to promote the advancement of outstanding scholarship and leadership, the perpetuation of the honored traditions of the 106-year-old secret society and the University, and the maintenance of the general spirit of Penn State

**Disability Studies Student Group**

**August 2012 – Present**

- Co-founder of activism group that promotes awareness of disability stereotypes and how to end them by holding campus wide events

**IFC/Pan-Hellenic Dance Marathon Committee Member**

**2010 – Present**

- Rules and Regulations 2010-2011; Family Relations Chairperson 2011-2012; Public Relations 2012-2013; Morale 2013-2014

**State of State Committee Member**

**2013 – Present**

- Assisted with recruitment of innovative speakers and university leaders to create a dialogue on the past, present, and future of Penn State