5-2-2007

Comparing friendships of college students from intact and divorced families

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COMPARING FRIENDSHIPS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

FROM INTACT AND DIVORCED FAMILIES

by
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A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 2, 2007

Approved by _____
Advisors

Date Approved _5/2/0 7_

ABSTRACT

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COMPARING FRIENDSHIPS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS
FROM INTACT AND DIVORCED FAMILIES
2006/07
Dr. Dihoff and Dr. Epifanio
Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in quality and quantity of friendships in young adults with divorced parents compared to young adults from intact families. To identify this, college students (n=25) from a Mid-Atlantic University filled out a questionnaire related to friendship. The participants who fell into the divorced group (n= 7) filled out an additional questionnaire that examined the impact that parental divorce had on their life. Using a t test to compare the friendship scores, it was found that there was no significant difference in the quality of friendships of the participants from both groups. However, the quantity of friendships did show a correlation with the intactness of a participant's family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Need

The amount of people who are divorced is staggering. According to D. Wayne Matthews (2003), a researcher at North Carolina State University, 2 out of 5 children before the age of eighteen will have parents who have divorced. How are these children handling the changing dynamics of their family? Most of the previous research has focused on how children are academically and behaviorally affected by divorce. Some of the short term effects are lower academic achievement, negative self-esteem, sadness, anger, impulsivity, and increased dependency (Matthews, 2003).

Often, people tend to look at how the children are handling the divorce at the present moment, but research has shown that children may be affected ten years past the initial separation when they are now young adults. In a study by Wallerstein (1985), anger and resentment towards parents were still present years later, but the romantic relationships of these individuals were also affected; they were likely to be fearful of commitment and intimacy and have more conflicts with their partners than young adults raised in intact families (as cited in Matthews, 2003, p.4). If they have trust issues in their intimate relationships, does divorce also have an effect on their relationships with peers? How do their friendships compare to young adults from intact families?

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of divorce on friendship. The number of friends and the quality of those friendships was examined in participants from intact and non-intact families.

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that divorce would have a greater effect upon the number of friends a participant has and the quality of those friendships in the participants from non-intact families compared to the participants from intact families.

Theory/Background

Sociability, confidence, and social sensitivity are all characteristics of children who can establish good friendships (Dunn, Davis, O'Conner, & Sturgess, 2001). Friendships can be important in helping children cope with transitions in life such as starting high school, first heartbreaks, and family problems. Using the friendship quality questionnaire, it was found that children with high-quality close friendships had less negative feelings about having to live in separate households following a divorce than children who lacked close friendships (Dunn et al., 2001).

Research has shown that friendship is related to how children get along with parents following a divorce, but the results were contradicting. In one study, negative parent-child relationships were associated with closer friendships outside the family (Dunn et al., 2001). However, in another study, it was found that if family relationships were full of conflict, a disruption in friendship occurred (Hannum & Divorak, 2004).

Definition of Terms

1. Divorce- Divorce is the process in which a wife and husband legally and emotionally decided to end their marriage.

2. Intact family- At least one child is the natural child of both members of the couple, and no child is a stepchild of either member of the couple.

3. Non-Intact family- A separation or divorce has occurred, and the child is no longer being raised in a household with two biological parents; the individual may go back and forth between the two parents or be raised by one. Stepparents may also be part of the family dynamic.

4. Nonresidential parent- In a divorce or separation, it is the parent that does not reside with the child on a daily basis. Usually, this person is the father because mothers are often rewarded custody of the child. In a joint custody case, the child may have residence at one parent's home but often stay over the other parent's home during the week.

5. Sleeper Effect- Children seem to recover quickly from a divorce. However, they have subconsciously denied their feelings and that delayed reaction may have a social and emotional effect on an individual five to ten years later when they become young adults.

6. Friendship- A relationship in which a person can confide it and trust in another individual outside of his/her immediate family.

Assumptions

It was assumed that the participants were all college students who were over the age of eighteen. It was assumed that the participants in the past or currently had

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friendships to which they could answer the friendship quality questionnaire. It was assumed that there were almost equal participants from intact and non-intact families. It was assumed that the students answered the questionnaires honestly and accurately.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study that should be mentioned. The population included in this study was limited to college students from a suburban Mid-Atlantic university so the results may not be generalizable to students in other settings. Another limitation was the sample size and diversity of the population. Because the participants were college students, the age of the population may be a limitation for those that have experienced divorce; they may have had more or less time adjusting to it depending on the age at which the divorce occurred. Another limitation in this study is that only one perspective of family cohesiveness was given which may give a biased result.

Summary

Chapter II includes a review of the research and ideas related to the divorce and friendship. This research includes the social and emotional effects of divorce on the participants' relationships with peers. Chapter III includes the design details of the study. Chapter IV includes a review of the results that were found from the study. Chapter V includes a discussion of the results that were found and the implications of those results for future research on this topic.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The research discussed below is focused on topics about divorce and friendship that is related to the current study. The areas of divorce that are discussed include the general effects and adjustments to divorce, children's relationships with parents prior to and following marital separation, and the relativity of gender and age to divorce. The areas of friendship that are discussed include parental influence on friendship, the idea of friendship, and the relationship between optimism and social support.

Statistics of Divorce

Over one million children will experience divorce every year, and before children reach eighteen, two out of five will experience the separation of their parents (Matthews, 1998). 25% of children will be a member of a stepfamily with 80% of divorcees remarrying with some of those marriages also ending in divorce (Hetherington, 1989). In the last decade, the difference in well-being of children from intact and divorced families has grown with children in the latter group exhibiting poorer behavior, lower self-esteem, and less achievement at school even prior to the actual separation (Sun, 2001).

The Effects of Divorce

Following a divorce, the basic needs of children (physiological, security, love, and self-esteem) are vulnerable from the loss of one parent and restructuring of home life (Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, & Roberts, 1990). Some of the effects of divorce may emerge soon after the divorce while others may take years to manifest. Those short-term effects

may include lower academic achievement, negative self-esteem, sadness, anger, impulsivity, social adjustment difficulty, less parental supervision, and increased dependency; whether these behaviors or cognitions emerge and for how long are dependent upon the personality of the child, the ability to find good support systems, and the maintenance of a secure parent-child relationship (Matthews, 1998). According to Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989), the offspring of divorce may continue to experience neediness, anger, and depression five years after the divorce along with difficulties socially such as dating, being unable to trust or commit to others and having less contact with parents. Having a poor quality parent-child relationship can affect a child through adulthood even if the young adult is no longer living or communicating frequently with their parent (Riggio, 2004).

The Sleeper Effect

According to Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989), a sleeper effect may sometimes occur in children in which they seem to recover quickly from a divorce. However, they have subconsciously denied their feelings and that delayed reaction may have a social and emotional effect on an individual five to ten years later when they become young adults especially for women. "...anxiety carried over from the divorced family relationships threatened to bar the young people's ability to create new, enduring relationships of their own (pp.299-300). However, in a study by Dunlop and Burns (1995), there was evidence that heightened anxiety did occur in girls 3 years following a divorce due to the added pressure that accompany adolescence, but no evidence of a sleeper effect was found that inhibited their ability to establish intimate relationships. At the 3 year mark, Dunlop and Burns found that the anxiety of boys, who initially were

more shocked than girls by the separation of their parents, leveled off to show similarities with boys from intact families. In a study by Clark-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, and Booth (2000), they found additional support that a sleeper effect does not occur when it was found that younger children who were initially more upset about their parents' divorce seemed to better adjusted ten years after the separation than their older siblings. The younger children no longer exhibited the eating disturbances, separation anxiety, and nightmares that occurred during the first few years after the divorce.

Adjustment to Divorce

When individuals undergo a traumatic or stressful event, their worldview and self-identity can be altered dramatically, and these changes may persist years after the initial incident occurred (Janoff-Bulman, 1989).

How children fare following the divorce is dependent upon the conflict level of the parents before and after separating, the quality of parenting from both, and the stress the child may be experiencing due to changing schools, making new friends, and financial strain (Amato, 2001). The child-rearing and social environment, history and background of the family, custodial parent's adjustment, and individual processes (intelligence, independence, and internal control) are also influencing factors in how children adjust to divorce (Stolberg& Bush, 1985). All of those factors can affect whether a child improves, declines, or doesn't change their level of functioning as they adapt to the separation (Amato, 2001).

In Hetherington's study (1989), children clustered in three groups: aggressive-insecure, opportunistic-competent, and caring-competent. The first group was unpopular with their peers, was impulsive and noncompliant at home and in school, was withdrawn

and anxious, and tended to live in homes with working mothers with ineffectual parenting and poor conflict-resolution. The latter groups got along well with peers and teachers, had little behavior problems, were described as self-sufficient and assertive, and had a good handle on stressful situations. Friendships seemed to be the most stable in the caring-competent group because they were less focused on gaining power in a relationship and more focused on sharing than the opportunistic clustered children. Hetherington (1989) found that how children adjust to divorce (whether they are winners, survivors, or losers) is dependent on a variety of factors including the characteristics of the child, the current age of the child, the resources available to them, their experiences in life, and their interpersonal relationships.

Low-Conflict Homes

In regards to conflict, it was found that children from high-conflict divorced homes fared better than children from high-conflict intact homes while children from low-conflict homes, divorced or intact, had the highest level of adjustment (Richardson & McCabe, 2001). Sometimes divorce can be beneficial in that it removes children from contentious family environments. However, longitudinal research has shown that a majority of divorces are not caused by intense and destructive marital conflict and are preceded by "irreconcilable differences" or a need for personal growth (Amato, 2001). When a marriage was dissolved in a low-conflict home, boys and girls sometimes had the tendency to internalize more of their problems and have more distress than those in which there was high conflict prior to the divorce (Amato, 2001; Peris & Emery, 2004). A reason for this may be that the divorce was more unexpected so the children struggle in adjusting to a new family structure.

Parent Modeling After Divorce

Seeing how a parent reacts to the stressful situations, such as a divorce, can affect how a child responds to the same situation (Mack, 2001). For example, if a child sees and hears a lot of anger between his parents, then he will be more likely to have difficulty in his interpersonal relationships including with his parents (Mack, 2001). When parents do not attempt to explain the changes that may undergo a divorce and continue to model hostility toward their exes, children may try to generate their own interpretations of their family situation which may cause externalized and internalized psychopathology and poor social skills (Stolberg & Bush, 1985).

In a study by Stolberg and Bush (1985), development of prosocial relationships (15.2% of the variance), more involvement in prosocial activities (13.7% of the variance), and less internalization of thoughts and feelings (10.2% of the variance) was associated with the use of effective parenting techniques (no examples were given). If adults had a secure relationship with their parents, they reported higher levels of self-confidence compared to adults from intact families (Mack, 2001). It has also been found that these children are more independent and self-reliant due to having to take on more chores and take care of younger siblings while their custodial parent works to support the family (Weiss, 1979; Riggio, 2004). The children who were able to deal with the divorce constructively were found to be more responsible and determined to reach goals (Franklin et al, 1990).

In a study by Wallerstein and Lewis (2004), they found that children were resilient to the effects of divorce if the following criteria were met: 1) child had

continuing contact with both parents, 2) parents did not resort to fighting to settle their differences, and 3) there was financially stability in both homes.

The Effect of Gender in Relationship with Parents

Some studies have found that there is causal link between gender and a child's relationship with his/her parents following a divorce. Opposite-sex parent-child dyads (mother-son, father-daughter) were found to the most affected relationship following a divorce in some studies (Amato & Keith, 1991). Cooney et al. (1986) found that there is a greater risk for disruption in the father-daughter relationship when a divorce occurs (as cited in Kilmann, Carranza, & Vendemia, 2006). In a mother-custody one-parent household, adjustment for boys is more difficult because they do not have a father figure or male role model while girls tended to have a positive relationship with their mother, but when a stepfather entered the picture, the reverse occurred with girls having more difficulty in adjusting (Matthews, 1998). Divorced mothers were found not to be as supervisory as non-divorced mothers in that they knew less about where their children were, who they were with, and what they were doing so sons tended to spend more time with their peers (Hetherington, 1989). In other studies, there has been no effect in a child's relationship with their mother.

Hetherington (1989) found that children tended to model the behavior of their same-sex parent. For example, girls would seek out support because their mothers had and confided in multiple sources of support while boys did not want to discuss their feelings because fathers usually would not utilize the emotional support that was initiated by family and friends. Adolescent girls report more self-disclosure, closer bonds with same-sex friends, and quicker formation of friendships than boys which may be due to

the fact that girls tend to receive more maternal help in forming friendships than boys (Vernberg, Beery, Ewell, & Abwender, 1993). Boys who reside with fathers are more mature, social, independent, and have higher self-esteem than those who lives with their mothers or girls who live with their fathers (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan, & Anderson, 1989). Father-adolescent and father-young adult relationships were significant predictors of educational level achieved, internalization of problems, and the security of romantic attachment (Summers, Forehand, Armistead, & Tannenbaum, 1998).

Children's Relationships with Both Parents

Most research supports the notion that the parent-child relationship has the most impact on the long-term psychosocial adjustment of children. In a study done by Aquilino (1994), it was found that young adults whose parents divorced after age 19 did not have as strong as a relationship with their parents as their peers from intact families. They also were found to have higher rights of juvenile misbehavior, lower educational and socioeconomic attainment in adulthood, and more emotional distance with their parents (White, 1994).

Young adults who lived with their mothers were more likely to blame their fathers for family troubles while young adults who lived with their fathers were more likely to blame their mothers (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). However, for those who lived in a joint custody arrangement, they reported lower levels of loss and distress than those who only resided with one parent. If children are provided with supportive, structured, and authoritative parenting, they are better able to cope with life stressors (Hetherington, 1989). Even establishing a close bond with one parent can act as a buffer against the stressors associated with divorce (Richardson & McCabe, 2001). Hannum and Dvorak

(2004) found that attachment to the father is a strong predicator of their child's social adjustment, and attachment to mother is a strong predictor of psychological distress.

Research on Remarriage

Most children and parents adjust within three years of the initial distressing separation if no new changes occur or little conflict exists between the parents (Hetherington et al, 1989). Children who have a relationship with their parents based on mutual respect are more accepting of new and healthy relationships between one parent and a new partner (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). However, when remarriage occurs, there is an additional adjustment period that is difficult especially for older children due to addition of a new family member, restructuring in the household (new rules, different schedules), and the stresses that continue over from the parental separation. Older adolescents are also not as concerned about the entrance of a stepparent because they are anticipating leaving home soon and entering adulthood, and younger children are able to form attachment with competent stepparents so children from age 7 to 15 may have the most difficulty in adjusting to remarriage (Hetherington et al, 1989). In restructuring the family, each member must establish new patterns of interaction within and outside of the family (Franklin et al, 1990).

Research on Age and Divorce

Some studies have shown that the children's age when the marital disruption occurred may show long-term psychological effects (Amato & Keith, 1991). It was believed that children who were younger had more negative effects than older children (Amato & Keith, 1991). Other studies have shown that because adolescents spend more

time with peers and may repress their feelings associated with the divorce, they may be more affected in the long-run than children of divorce (Matthews, 1998).

Research on Children's Cognitions after Divorce

Usually after divorce, there is a period of shock, confusion, abandonment, anger, and unhappiness for children (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Children will self-blame, act out frequently, and be more apprehensive and sensitive when interacting with others (Kelly & Berg, 1978). This is especially true in children whose parents divorced before the age of 6 years compared to children whose parents divorced at a later age; this was evident in the children's play and interaction with peers, task orientation, and adjustment at preschool (Pagani, Boulerice, Tremblay, & Vitaro, 1997). Because there is a decline in father involvement following a divorce, children of divorce are also more likely to wonder whether their fathers loved them compared to their peers from intact families (Peris & Emery, 2004).

Kurdek and Berg (1987) found that half of the children tested in a study about divorce revealed that they would be upset if other children asked a lot of questions about their parents because they were afraid that other children wouldn't be supportive. They also found that most younger children believe that one parent exclusively is to blame for the divorce (usually their father), that if she is "good" her parents will reconcile, that they will have to hold the family together, that their parents fight more in their presence, that their families will still do things together, that their friends wouldn't understand their feelings towards their parents, that their parents don't want them, and they may have to live with a relative. Children of divorce had a more negative view of others and the world than themselves compared to children from intact families who believed that their own

self-worth was the strongest determinant of success in relationships (Franklin et al, 1990). However, even though, children whose parents recently divorced were found to have more anxiety and less competence in school than their peers of longer-standing divorces, the divorce did not show a significant impact on the children's perceived self-esteem (Wyman, Cowen, Hightower, & Pedro-Carroll, 1985).

Research on Adolescents of Divorce

Attachment to peers in young adulthood is related to attachment to parents as they become a replacement for the support provided earlier by the family (Hannum & Dvorak, 2004). During the adolescent stage of development, individuals are undergoing a lot of transitions, such as just forming their own identify, establishing first loves and new friendships, working part-time, graduating high school and entering college, and moving away from home so when divorce is added into the mix, it can add additional stress and affect their adjustment in all of those areas listed above (Daniels, 1990).

Children and teenagers were less involved in extracurricular activities and enrichment programs due to inability to afford those activities, less availability of parents to transport the child, interruptions in schedule because of custody schedule, and less interaction of custodial parent with neighborhood parents (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). However, it was also found that adolescents are able to understand where the blame of divorce lies and are able to cope better with the stress of new family members and economic changes than younger children; they also already have relationships outside of their family that they can turn to for nurturance (Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee, & Sippola, 1996; Hetherington et al, 1989).

As children reach adolescence, parents should discuss with them the reasons that their marriage was terminated because silence and vague explanations that were previously given don't dispel the idea that divorce is sudden as opposed to taking years of unhappiness to manifest (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004).

Research on Young Adults

Young adults of divorced families feel that their parents' breakup stands out as the formative event of their childhood and that their childhoods were shortchanged by not having an intact family (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000; Weiss, 1979). In a study by Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000), 75% of the young adults believe that they would have been different people if their parents hadn't gotten divorced. A fourth of the participants also felt that their friends whose parents were not divorced led happier lives than they did. The researchers also found that half of the participants worried about both of their parents attending important events in their lives such as weddings and graduations; a reasoning for this finding could be that the young adult is concerned about the possible conflict that might arise between his parents which would detract attention away from his happy moment and cause embarrassment for everyone involved.

In a study by Richardson and McCabe (2001), it was found that young adults from non-intact families were less satisfied with their life, had more anxiety, and had poorer same-sex relations than did their peers from intact families, but no difference was found on variables measuring depression, stress, opposite-sex relations, and global self-concept. Their anxieties lead them to make destructive choices in mates, to be promiscuous and impulsive, or to avoid intimate contact altogether due to their belief in the stigma of being "a child of divorce" (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). In a study by

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Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000), they found that young adults have many worries that young adults have doubts about their past, present, and future family and interpersonal relationships due to having gone through their parents' divorce years earlier. Adult offspring of divorce have observed that personal relationships can end if dissatisfying and that lack of relationship commitment can affect their behaviors and attitudes across all relationships especially with significant others (Riggio, 2004; Summers et al., 1998). The poor formation of stable relationships may be related to living in a high-conflict home with poor parental models of behavior (Riggio, 2004).

In life-story interviews with young adults, Cartwright (2006) found some of the negative beliefs they held:

"I have trust with people, but then sometimes you don't really trust them. Like we're not really a family because we're all separate and doing our own things.

I don't feel like I have a role model relationship to kind of follow."

However, some of the young adults were able to learn from their parents' experiences and come away with the idea of commitment.

"I think it's made me totally appreciate relationships a bit more, or realize that you need to work harder with them".

Research on College Students

During the first year of college, young adults are often faced with many changes including the development of new friendships (Oswald & Clark, 2003). Having a good social network has been found to help students adjust to the stress of college life (Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Oswald & Clark, 2003). In a study by Young and Paris (1977), they found that college women from divorced families had lower self-concepts

and were more insecure than their peers from intact families. However, in a study done twenty five years later, McIntyre, Heron, McIntyre, Burton, and Engler (2003) found that college students whose parents divorced are found to be more vulnerable to distress but also are more resilient to adjustment problems. College students of divorce were found to adjust better and show more resilience due to social responsibility (promoting the welfare of others, finishing the things you start) and low other-direction (how own behavior is directed by peer's standards) (McIntyre et al, 2003). Regardless of marital status, undergraduates who adjust well to college have more satisfying social support from peers in which they get and reciprocate help (McIntyre et al, 2003).

Research on Trust

For children who have been exposed to divorce or marital conflict, their ability to establish trust and loyalty in relationships is shaken (Hess & Camara, 1979). Giuliani, Iafrate, and Rosnati (1998) found that adolescents from intact and divorced homes do not differ on the amount of friends they have and how frequently they interacted with them, but offspring of divorce scored higher on a distrust of others scale than their peers. From this result, they inferred that the differences in attitude between the two groups may affect their behavior in the long-run (i.e. when and who they decided to marry and whether those relationships last). Children of divorce did not have difficulty in trusting a dating partner, but when the idea of marriage came up, they were fearful of betrayal in future and present relationships, expressed concerns in trusting a spouse and were less optimistic that a marriage could last (Franklin et al, 1990; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

Research on Optimism and Social Support

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It is inevitable that many changes are going to occur for parents and children when a divorce occurs; having an optimistic outlook may help in the adjustment of children and adolescents to those changes. It has been found that optimists tend to cope better with stress than pessimists (Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002). Both qualitative aspects of social groups, such as their reliability of social support, and structural aspects of social groups, such as their size, can affect psychological well-being (Cohen & Willis, 1985). Those who have a greater number of relationships with friends, family members, coworkers, and neighbors report less distress and greater positive affect than those who have fewer of these relationships (Cohen & Willis, 1985). Previous studies have indicated that optimists are able to attract more social support which may be the reason for their better adjustment to life stressors. Those who seek out social support in order to cope with stress may bring about support from others while those who use avoidance and displacement of emotions may discourage the support of others (Brissette et al, 2002). Higher quality friendships are related to the association between optimism and increased social support (Brissette et al., 2002). Because optimists use coping strategies along with having stronger social networks, they are better able to adjust to stressful life events than pessimists (Brissette et al., 2002).

Research on Parental Influence on Friendship

Parents can directly or indirectly influence their children's relationships with their peers. Direct parental influence include actually coaching or instructing children how to interact socially while indirect influence is when parents give their children opportunities to participate in social activities without emphasizing the social benefits that may

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accompany those interactions, such as moving to certain neighborhoods with sports teams or transportation their child to dance class or music lessons (Vernberg et al, 1993).

In a study by Gauze et al. (1996), it was found that friendships and parental relationships are inversely proportional. When a home environment is less than optimal, friendships can help children compensate with the stressors that are related to their family; in an adaptive family environment, parents can help children deal with their inadequacies in the friendship domain. The relationships a person has with their parents and peers function together to influence their psychosocial well-being during adolescence. It was found that if a teenager had two or more unsatisfying relationships regardless of the type (parent or friend), they had poorer self-reported adjustment. In contrast, if those two relationships were satisfying, a teenager was better adjustment especially if the relationship with the friend was close, and they had a more positive attitude about their family.

Wyman et al. (1985) reported that children of divorce have fewer close friends, spent less time with those friends, and did not participate in many activities (school, religious, or sport). Children from single-parent homes were found to have less contact with their friends because of more involvement in household activities, but the quality of and disclosure in those friendships did not differ significantly from children who resided in different family settings (Dunn et al, 2001; Riggio, 2004).

Between 7th and 10th grades, the companionship of same-sex friendships goes beyond the disclosure that adolescents have with their parents; they help the teenager form positive views about themselves and acquire more interpersonal skills (Vernberg et al, 1993). Children at risk for adjustment problems during adolescence are those who

seem to have such a strong orientation to their peers that they give up other friends or activities and are easily pressured into participating in problem behavior due to their desire to be accepted by a particular crowd (Fuligni, Eccles, Barber, & Clements, 2001; Stolberg & Bush, 1985). Having to move to a new home and parents having to work more may increase social isolation or cause them to associate with delinquent peers (Wyman et al, 1985). If parents are deemed too controlling and restrictive or too neglectful and permissive, children are also more likely to seek advice and be more susceptible to influence from their peers (Fuligini et al, 2001).

Research on Friendship

How someone defines "friend" can differ from person to person and culture to culture (Rybak & McAndrew, 2006). Lindsey (2002) defines friendship as a close dyadic relationship between two individuals. Friendships provide children with a sense of belonging and someone to confide in and lean on during transitions such as the arrival of a sibling, starting school, the death of a family member, and first crushes and heartbreaks (Dunn, Davies, O'Connor, & Sturgess, 2001; Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Sociability, confidence, and social sensitivity are all characteristics of children who can establish good friendships especially if parents provide care and affection (Dunn et al., 2001). Rawlins (1992) found that long-term friendships are dependent upon shared histories, accumulated experiences, and simultaneously moving through developmental transitions (as cited in Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Being able to maintain a friendship requires a person to be other-oriented as well as self-oriented; an awareness of how one behaves with their friends aids in the development of skills to manage interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Best friends have been found to be very

important because they provide more emotional acceptance, trust, self-disclosure, and enjoyment than just friends (Oswald & Clark, 2003).

As early as toddlerhood, children begin to form preferences for playmates within their group and often look for peers who are similar to them in age, sex, race, and physical attractiveness (Lindsey, 2002). When children reach school-age, they begin spending more time with their friends where they can share interests and engage in self-disclosure (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Hallinum (1980) found that school-aged children average 3-5 best friends while 80-90% of teenagers have mutual friends with 1-2 of those friends being their best friends (as cited in Hartup & Stevens, 1997). The emphasis for high school seniors related to friendship is being able to trust and confide in friends and having similar interests, experiences, and activities (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Usually, schools and neighborhoods are where most friendships are formed on the basis of frequent interactions and participation in joint activities (Crosnoe, 2000).

Previous research has shown that if friendships are maintained throughout major life changes, they can act as a buffer to the stress accompanying those situations (Rybak & McAndrew, 2006). Friends can be especially protective against the effects of privation and stress associated with relationship strains or losses (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Marital discord is stressful to children because parents are often preoccupied with their own problems so they may not be providing their children with the emotional support they need (Wasserstein & La Greca, 1996). When marital discord does occur, close friends may reduce the social difficulties for children in homes with parental conflict due to being able to provide emotional support (Wasserstein & La Greca, 1996). Using the friendship quality questionnaire, it was found that children with high-quality close

friendships had less negative feelings about having to live in separate households following a divorce than children who lacked close friendships (Dunn et al., 2001). It was found that even one friend can moderate the negative feelings of divorce and lessen the effects of rejection by other children (Hetherington, 1989). In studies about social support, it was found that elementary school-age children believe that their friends are good providers of social companionship, and middle school-age children consider their peers as a source of acceptance and intimacy (Reid, Landesman, Treder, & Jaccard, 1989).

Friendship Quality

According to Hartup (1996), the identity of one's friends and the quality of one's relationships with them is more significant than whether one has a friend. Friendships can differ qualitatively in many ways: 1) their content functions (what two activities they do together), 2) their constructiveness (whether conflicts can be resolved in a normal matter like negotiation), 3) their closeness (if they self-disclose and if they spend time with one's companions), 4) their symmetry (whether friends influence each other equally), and 5) their affective character (whether the friendship is supportive and not frequently conflicted). If all of those factors are not present in a friendship, then it increases the likelihood that a child may be negatively influenced by his peers or that a child may not adjust as well to life transitions if not adequately supported.

Friendship and Gender

It was found that even though boys and girls differ in the conceptualization and structure of their friendships, they benefit equally from establishing and maintaining them (Gauze et al, 1996). However, there isn't a lot of research on whether boys and girls are

more satisfied with their friendships. Girls do have smaller and more exclusive friendship networks than boys in elementary school while the opposite is true in adolescence in which boys form tighter friendship networks (Hartup & Stevens, 1997).

Summary

In summary, research has shown that divorce can negatively affect children academically, behaviorally, and socially. However, the research is mixed on whether friendship can act as a buffer to the negative consequences of parental divorce or whether the divorce can disrupt or hinder the formation and maintenance of one's friendships.

CHAPTER III: DESIGN

Participants

The participants in this experiment consisted of 25 undergraduate students from a suburban Mid-Atlantic university. 7 of the participants fell into the category of non-intact families (families of divorce). 18 of the participants fell into the category of intact families. The students ranged in age from 18 to 52. The participants included males (n=16) and females (n=9). The socioeconomic class of the participants was middle class. A majority of the participants were taking the questionnaire in order to fulfill a general psychology requirement.

Materials

The participants had to fill out three questionnaires (see Appendix A). The first one was a socio-demographic questionnaire that included participant variables such as age, sex, ethnicity, parent's educational level, and family structure (who they reside with, parental marital status, and age, sex, and number of siblings). The questionnaire contained 11 questions.

The second questionnaire was to only be answered by the children from non-intact families because it furthered examined the family structure. The experimenter developed this questionnaire based upon previous research related to divorce. The age at which the divorce occurred and their feelings about the parental separation currently and when the divorce occurred were assessed. Using a 4 point Likert scale (1=strongly agree to 4=strongly disagree), the students also rated their relationship with both parents, and the

impact that the divorce had on their life. The questionnaire had 22 statements with 2

buffers that were not scored.

The third questionnaire focused on friendship, and it was taken by all participants.

The questionnaire was devised by the experimenter that related to friendship surveys

done in previous research. Students noted the number of friends they currently had on a

5-point scale ranging from 0(none) to 4(six or more). On a scale from 1 to 10, the

students also rated the current satisfaction level they had in their friendships. A close

friend was defined as someone that the participants felt that had a connection with and

whom they believe that could trust and confide in. Students also rated on the quality of

their friendships on 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree to 4=strongly disagree). The

Dynamics of friendship, amount of time spent with friends, and the level of trust were

areas of examination. The questionnaire contained 24 statements with 3 buffers that were

not scored and an open-ended question. The latter question inquired what the person

would change (if anything) about their friendships.

Reliability/Validity of Scales

The questionnaires were developed by the experimenter so there was no test-retest

reliability. The basis of validity came from examination by an internal review board at

the university.

Method

The study took place at a Mid-Atlantic university in the late afternoon on two

days in the early spring in order to get a good amount of people for the study. After all

the participants entered the room, the experimenter informed the them that they would be

participating in a research study about family structure and friendship but were not told

the exact details of the study. The experimenter then handed out the questionnaires and explained to the participants that they were to fill out the first and third sections completely and that if the second section about divorce didn't pertain to them, they didn't need to fill it out.

After they finished filling out the questionnaires, they gave it to the experimenter who then handed the participant a feedback sheet. The feedback sheet contained information on how to contact the experimenter if the participants wanted to find out the results of the research.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variable is the intactness of the participants' family (whether their parents were divorced or together). The dependent variables were the quantity and quality of the participants' friendships that was reflected in the score and ratings from the friendship questionnaire. It was expected that there would be an effect on the quantity and quality of the young adults' friendships from the non-intact group compared to intact group. However, due to an increase in social acceptance and higher rates of divorce, it is also predicted that the effect would be only marginally significant.

Analysis of Data

Independent samples *t*-tests were performed on this data at the .05 level to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the groups. The experimenter grouped all the participants from intact families and all the participants from non-intact families and examined the scores they received on the friendship questionnaire. Higher scores on the questionnaires indicted more negative beliefs about friendship and divorce so a higher score on the friendship questionnaire indicated a

poorer quality of friendship while a higher score on the divorce questionnaire indicated more difficulties adjusting to their parents' divorce. A lower score on the friendship questionnaire indicated a stronger quality of friendship, and a lower score on the divorce questionnaire indicated a better adjustment to the divorce. A correlational analysis was used to look at whether the number of friends that a participant has (quantity) was related to the intactness of their family. A correlational analysis was also used for the participants from the divorced groups' responses to the questionnaire about their parents' divorce to see if there was a relationship between those factors and their relationships with their peers.

Summary

In this study, undergraduate college students were questioned about the structure of their family. The participants were lumped into two groups related to the structure of their family: intact and non-intact. The participants from the intact families had to fill out two questionnaires while the non-intact families had to fill out three questionnaires because the additional one contained questions related to the aftermath of the divorce of their parents. The test scores were collected, and an independent samples *t*-test was used to analyze the results of the groups. A correlational analysis was used for the results obtained from the divorce questionnaire. It was hypothesized that the students from the divorced group would have significantly higher scores on the friendship questionnaire compared to the students from the intact group thus indicating a poorer quality of friendship. It was also hypothesized that there would be a significant difference in the quantity of friendships between the two groups. It was also hypothesized that there would

be correlation between the participants' (from the non-intact group) scores on the divorce questionnaire and the friendship questionnaire.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to compare the quality and quantity of friendships in college students from intact and divorced families. It was hypothesized that the college students whose parents were divorced would have a higher score on friendship questionnaire than their peers whose parents were still married. For this study, a higher score indicated a poorer quality of friendship. It was also hypothesized that the participants from the divorced group would have fewer friends than the participants from the intact group. It was also hypothesized that there would be correlation between the participants' (from the non-intact group) scores on the divorce questionnaire and the scores they had on the friendship questionnaire.

Results

For this study, the participants had to fill out several questionnaires. Participants from both the intact and non-intact group had to fill out questionnaires concerning their background information (age, gender, marital status of parents, living situation) and the quality and quantity of their friendships. Participants from the divorced group had to fill out an additional questionnaire that focused on areas related to their parents' divorce such as the age when the separation occurred, the level of conflict between their parents, and their adjustment to the divorce. 18 of the participants were from intact families, and 7 of the participants were from non-intact families.

A t test for independent samples showed a non-significant difference, $t(23) = .144$, $p=.887$ in the mean friendship scores of the participants from the divorced and intact

group. However, it is important to note that the mean score of the non-intact group was slightly lower than the mean score of the intact group (see figure 4.1). The mean score for the divorced group was 29.9 with a standard deviation of 3.80, and the mean score for the intact group was 30.2 with a standard deviation of 5.14.

Figure 4.1 Mean scores for the intact and divorced group
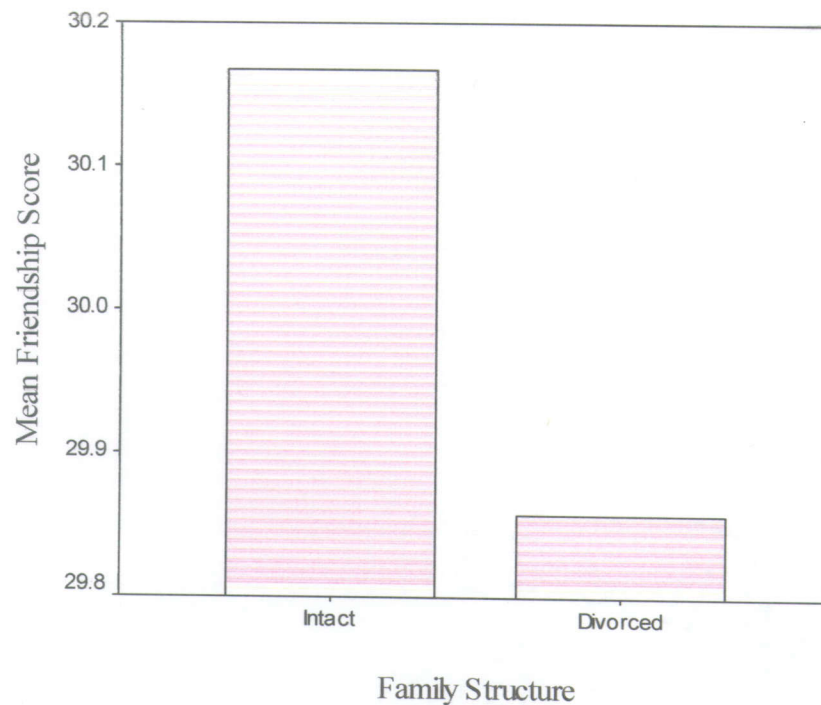
Regarding the quantity of friendships in the two groups, it was found that there was a significant correlation between the number of friends that one has and the intactness of their family, $r(25)= -.507$, $p=.010$. The participants in the divorced group reported having fewer friends than the participants in the intact group.

The scores that the divorce group had on the questionnaire specifically related to the impact that their parents' divorce had on their life were not correlated with the scores that they had on the friendship questionnaire, $r(7)= -.049$, $p=.917$. There was also no

correlation between the scores on the divorce questionnaire and the age at which their parents' divorce occurred, r(7)= -. 306, p=.505.

Summary

In summary, there were three findings in this study. Using an independent samples *t* test, the first finding showed that there was not a significant difference in the quality of friendships between each group, but the divorce group did score slightly better than their peers. A correlational analysis was used for the second and third findings. The second finding showed that there was a significant correlation in the intactness of the participant's family and the quantity of their friendships. The participants in the intact group had more friends than the participants in the divorce group. The third finding showed that there was not a correlation between the score that the divorce group had on the friendship questionnaire and the score that they had on the divorce questionnaire. The age at which the divorced occurred was also found to be non-significant.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Review of Results

After reviewing the data, it was found that there was no significance between the structure of one's family and the quality of their friendship. However, the participants from the divorced group did score lower than the participants from the intact group which was a surprising result. This finding contradicts the hypothesis that the scores of the participants from the divorced group would be higher than the scores of the participants from the intact group. Because the friendships of the participants from the divorced group were shown to be slightly more qualitative than their peers, this finding does support the research that friendships can act as a buffer to the stressors associated with divorce (Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Rybak & McAndrew, 2006).

The way the questions were comprised may be another reason why the results were not significant between the two groups. The last question on the friendship questionnaire was open-ended and stated, "If I could change one thing about my current friendships, it would be......". A majority of the participants, including those in the divorce group, indicated that they would like to spend more time with their friends who go to different colleges or that they would like to make more friends on campus. However, quite of few of the participants in the intact group indicated that they wanted to have friends who were more supportive, friends who were less selfish, friends who didn't lie, and friends who would be more upfront instead of talking about someone behind their back. The participants who wrote these answers also rated their friendships as less satisfying. Because those few participants were dissatisfied with their current

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friendships, their results may have lowered the scores of the entire group making the intact group's average slightly lower than the divorced groups.

Even though the quality of the divorced group's friendships did not seem to be affected, it was found that the quantity of their friendships was significantly different than their peers. As hypothesized, the participants in the intact group had more friends than the participants in the divorce group. This finding supports previous research that a divorce can have an impact on children's interpersonal relationships. Because children of divorce may not have as much time to spend with their friends due to responsibilities at home, they might not have been able to establish as large a network of friends as their peers (Wyman et al, 1995). Some of the participants from the divorced group did indicate on their questionnaire that they could not participate in many after-school activities due to the divorce, and many friendships are formed by participating in similar activities.

The scores that the participants had on the divorce questionnaire did not show a correlation with their scores on the friendship questionnaire. This finding does not support the hypothesis which predicted that how one felt about their parents' divorce would be related to how one felt about their friendships. Although the divorce questionnaire did not indicate any significant findings, it was helpful in providing insight into how the young adults have adjusted to their parents' divorce. Even though many of the participants indicated that conflict did occur in the home prior to the divorce, they also indicated that they had frequent contact with their nonresidential parent after the divorce. Being able to maintain relationships with both parents following the divorce has

been shown to be beneficial to a child's well-being (Hetherington, 1989;Mack, 2001;Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004).

Another reason why the results for this study may not have been as significant as hypothesized could be due to the fact that divorce is more common today than it was in the past. All of the divorced group's participants strongly agreed to the statement on the questionnaire, "I think that divorce has become more acceptable in our society than it was in the past." Because almost 50% of the marriages today will end in divorce, more resources are being provided for students in schools to help them deal with the changes that might occur with divorce (Matthews, 1998). Many counselors hold divorce groups at school to help children and adolescents express the feelings (anger, confusion, anxiety, abandonment) with peers who are also going through the same situation If the young adults in this study were provided with any type of resource to help them adjust to the divorce or had parents who were knowledgeable about the negative impact that divorce can have on children, then the divorce may not have had as much of a negative impact as it did for the children in previous studies who were not provided with the same level of support.

Limitations

One limitation of the current study is that the questionnaires that were given to the participants did not have test-retest reliability. The scores may have been more significant had another friendship questionnaire with proven results, such as the Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Parker and Asher, 1993), been used. Because there was a wide array of questionnaires related to divorce, it was difficult for the researcher to pinpoint the areas that may have had the most impact on one's adjustment and

interpersonal relationships. If a pilot test had been conducted prior to giving out the questionnaires, it may have provided input into what questions needed modification in order to obtain more accurate views on the quality of one's friendships and a deeper understanding on the impact of divorce.

One limitation of this study involves the sample size and characteristics of the participants. The study only had 25 college students. Of those participants, 72% were from intact families while 28% were from divorced families. Because there was not an equal amount of participants to represent each group, the results may not have accurately reflected the impact that divorce has on the friendship quality of college students. The gender of the participants may have also been a limitation; there were more male participants in the study (64%) than female participants (36%). Previous research has shown that a parental divorce has more of an impact on the social and emotional functioning of women five years after its occurrence than it does on men (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989). The other limitation related to characteristics of this population is that all of the participants were college students from a Mid-Atlantic University so the results obtained on their quality of friendships may not generalize to all young adults. Differences could occur in scores obtained from a young adult population who are not college students or a young adult population from different areas of the country.

Because the study's main focus was on the impact of divorce on young adults in a college setting, another limitation of the study was that there were two participants who did not fit that age range. Their perceptions on friendships and family structure may have differed significantly than the younger population due to having more time to adjust to changes that may have occurred in both areas of study.

Another limitation was related to the age of the population used because a majority of the participants were freshmen between the ages of 18 and 19. According to Paul and Brier (2001), the first year of college is the most difficult period of adjustment for young adults because many changes are occurring especially related to interpersonal relationships. In their study, they found that freshmen are often faced with the challenge of forming a new network of friends while trying to maintain the friendships from their adolescent network of friends. For those students who may be having difficulty in either of those two areas, it could have impacted their score on the friendship questionnaire; they may have rated their friendships poorer compared to a sophomore, junior, or senior.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study did show that there was a difference in the quantity and quality of friendships between the two groups. The young adults in the divorced group did have fewer friends than the young adults in the intact group. Although the result was non-significant, they were also found to have slightly more qualitative friendships than the intact group. The reasoning for why the quantity of the divorced group's friendships was affected but not the quality was not clearly found so it has been determined that further research is needed into the impact that parental divorce has on their offspring's friendships.

Implications for Future Research

The most revealing and interesting findings of the questionnaire were related to the open-ended questions. For future research, it might be interesting to conduct interviews alongside of having the participants fill out the questionnaires. The interviews might be able to provide more insight into the level of conflict in the home prior to and

following the divorce, how the young adult's relationships changed with both parents, and the fears and concerns they have related to their current and future personal relationships. In addition, the interviews might be able to provide more insight into why the divorce group had a smaller number of friends, why some participants were dissatisfied with their friendships, and the differences between their friendships with members of the same-sex and opposite-sex.

It would also be interesting to further examine the friendships of males and females from divorce and intact families. Because the sample size in this study included more males than females, an analysis of this variable was not obtained. It would also be interesting to look at young adults from different socioeconomic backgrounds whose parents are divorced to see if economic advantages and disadvantages play a factor in the maintenance of friendship. It also would be interesting to look at young adults from different parts of the county and the world to see if friendships are more impacted in places where divorce is not as common. It would also be interesting to compare the friendships of children or adolescents and their parents following the divorce. If parents did not have stable friendships following their divorce, then it may have had an impact on the establishment and maintenance of their children's friendships. Any area related to the long-term social effects of divorce should continue to be studied.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

This section of the questionnaire is for the participants who have divorced parents. If that does not apply to you, please move on to page five of the packet.

At what age did the divorce occur?

     Birth to age 3

     Age 4 to Age 7

     Age 8 to Age 11

     Age 12 to Age 15

     Age 16 to Age 19

     Age 20 and up

Did you have to move after the divorce?   Yes   No

If yes: Did you have to change schools?   Yes   No
     Did you lose any friendships because of your relocation?   Yes   No

For the following 2 questions, circle three of the feelings listed. If you choose other, indicate the other feeling you may have been or currently are experiencing.

Immediately after my parents' divorce, I felt:

Sad	Angry	Confused	Self-conscious
Worried	Hurt	Shocked	Happy
Abandoned	Dependent	Secure	At fault
Supported	Resentful of others	Relieved	Independent
Other_____			

Now I feel:

Sad	Angry	Confused	Self-conscious
Worried	Hurt	Shocked	Happy
Abandoned	Dependent	Secure	At fault
Supported	Resentful of others	Relieved	Independent
Other_____			

Circle the number to indicate how you feel about the statements below:

strongly agree (1)   agree (2)   disagree (3)   strongly disagree (4)

1. There was little conflict between my parents before their divorce.

     1   2   3   4

2. I had frequent contact with my noncustodial parent (the parent that I did not reside with).

     1   2   3   4

3. I had to take on more responsibility (chores, watching siblings) following the divorce.

     1   2   3   4

4. My relationship with my mother has not changed since the divorce.

     1   2   3   4

5. My parents argued in front of me.

     1   2   3   4

6. Some of my friends' parents also are divorced.

     1   2   3   4

7. My relationship with my father has changed since the divorce.

     1   2   3   4

8. I had a good support system that helped me through the divorce.

     1   2   3   4

9. Besides my parents no longer living together, no other changes occurred in my life as a result of the divorce.

     1   2   3   4

10. My parents get along better now that they are divorced.

1　　2　　3　　4

11. I wasn't able to participate in many extracurricular activities because of the divorce.

1　　2　　3　　4

12. My parents' divorce has affected my relationships with others.

1　　2　　3　　4

13. Infidelity was a factor in the divorce of my parents.

1　　2　　3　　4

14. The divorce has not had an effect on my personality.

1　　2　　3　　4

15. I am fearful that I will get a divorce.

1　　2　　3　　4

16. I think that divorce has become more acceptable in our society than it was in the past.

1　　2　　3　　4

This section of the questionnaire contains questions about your friendships. Please circle or fill in the answer that best applies to you. For this study, a close friend is defined as someone that you feel that you have a connection with and whom you believe that you could trust and confide in.

How many friends do you currently have?

0

1

2-3

4-5

6 or more

How long have you been friends with the person you considered to be your closest friend?

Less than a year

1-2 years

3-5 years

6-10 years

11-15 years

More than 15 years

Where did you meet most of your friends? More than one may be circled for this question.

In class	Through my parents
At work	Through participation in sports
Are/Were Neighbors	Through other friends

Through participation in extracurricular activities

Through my siblings

On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the most satisfied), please rate how personally satisfied you are with your friendships.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Circle the number to indicate how you feel about the statements below:
strongly agree (1)   agree (2)   disagree (3)   strongly disagree (4)

1. I have more casual friends than close friends.

    1   2   3   4

2. I spend more time with my friends than my family.

    1   2   3   4

3. I have trouble forming friendships with people of the opposite-sex.

    1   2   3   4

4. I frequently argue with my friends.

    1   2   3   4

5. I have chosen friends based more on appearance than personality.

    1   2   3   4

6. I have more friends now than I did ten years ago.

    1   2   3   4

7. I have gotten into trouble or made some bad decisions because of influence from my friends.

    1   2   3   4

8. My friends and I share similar interests.

    1   2   3   4

9. I care about what my friends think about me.

    1   2   3   4

10. I am friends with at least one person from elementary school.

    1   2   3   4

11. When I have a personal problem, I usually try to work it out on my own instead of turning towards friends.

     1   2   3   4

12. Friendships made as adults last longer than friendships made as children.

     1   2   3   4

13. I have trouble forming friendships with people of the same-sex.

     1   2   3   4

14. Maintaining my friendships is important to me.

     1   2   3   4

15. It is important that my parents like or get along with my friends.

     1   2   3   4

16. If a casual friend was hurtful to me, I would no longer be able to be his/her friend.

     1   2   3   4

17. If I were to have a problem at home, I could turn to a friend for support.

     1   2   3   4

18. It is easier for women to make friends than it is for men.

     1   2   3   4

19. I can trust most of my friends.

     1   2   3   4

20. If I could change one thing about my current friendships, it would be

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_____