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CHILDREN OF DIVORCE VERSUS CHILDREN OF INTACT FAMILIES AND
THEIR ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE

By
Kimberly Martin

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
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Approved by _____
Professor

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ABSTRACT

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CHILDREN OF DIVORCE VERSUS CHILDREN OF INTACT FAMILIES AND
THEIR ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE
2003/04
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Masters of Arts in School Psychology

Children of divorce and children of intact families grow up in very different worlds. The purpose of this study was to investigate the affects that being a child of divorce has on later adjustment in college. A sample of 95 undergraduate students were administered the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. Of the 95 students, 18 reported being from divorced families, two reported parental death, and 75 reported their parents still being married. Results indicated that the age a child experiences their parents divorce can have a significant impact on their later attachment to college and social adjustment to college. More specifically, the younger a child was when they experienced their parents divorce the less attachment to college they reported. Also, children who experienced their parents' divorce before the age of four reported higher social adjustment to college than students who reported experiencing their parents divorce at age four or older. No significant differences between children of divorce and children of intact families were found on all measures of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire.

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Chapter 1

Need

Growing up in America has changed dramatically in the recent past. It was not too long ago that divorce was viewed as taboo and children almost always had two parents in their homes. College-aged Americans of today grew up in a very different place. A place where divorce grew like an epidemic in front of these children's eyes. Either their parents were divorced or they knew of many friends' parents who were divorced. Their daily lives were affected by this epidemic, in which children of divorce were affected most severely. It is now rarely argued that children of divorce are simply not affected by their parents' divorce, however, the severity of being affected is still a topic of debate. Now that these children are the college-age, it seems pertinent to address the affects of being a child of divorce on college adaptation. College, regardless of past experiences, requires a certain degree of adaptation. For most of these students, it is the first time they are living away from home, the first time they leave most, if not all, of their childhood friends, and the first time they are almost solely responsible for their actions. They can choose to go or to not go to class, they can choose to make friends and become social creatures or to turn inward and isolate. Most of these students are tasting a new found freedom for the first time in their lives. Some students seem to make this transition fairly easy, while others struggle. Their families of origin might very well affect their ability to or not to adapt. It is important to explore why certain students have difficulties adapting, because, in order to help these students, an

understanding of why they are having problems must first be established. If this study lends support to say that children of divorce exhibit more difficulties adapting than children of intact families, then it could be argued that colleges should offer children of divorce more support to help them adapt.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the link between college students' past experiences and the affect it has on their current and future experiences. More specifically, the study looks at children of divorce versus children of intact families and their differences or similarities in their capabilities to adapt during their first year of college.

Hypothesis

1. Children of divorce will exhibit more adaptation difficulties during college compared to children of intact families.
2. Children of divorce will be more concerned about their financial stability than children of intact families during college.
3. Children of divorce who experience parental divorce as a young child (at the age 5 or earlier) will exhibit less adaptation difficulties than children of divorce who experience parental divorce after the age of 5.

Theory

Children of divorce grow up in very different homes than children of intact families. Often children of divorce worry about one or both of their parents and become overwhelmed with the idea of taking care of them. According to The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, “The developmental path from adolescence into adulthood is thrown out of sync after divorce. Many children of divorce can’t get past adolescence because they cannot bring closure to the normal process of separating from their parents” (Wallerstein, Lewis, Blakeslee 2000). Children of divorce have more to overcome and come to terms with during their quest for adulthood than children of intact families. Often many of the issues that occur with divorce are either never resolved or only solved temporarily. This creates the problem for the children of divorce because despite the time distance of the actual divorce, many of the wounds are still fresh simply because they never had time to heal. Children of divorce are often given their first break during college. It is most likely the first time that they are removed from their home of origin, their parents and their haunting past. Their relationship with each parent will be re-evaluated and redefined. The parents who were being visited once every other weekend no longer have that mandated contact, while the parents who lived in the main residence of the child of divorce no longer sees that child on a daily basis. It is now up to the child how much contact each parent receives or does not receive. Psychologically, the child, now transitioning into adulthood, has many issues to deal with. For example, the sorrow for leaving a parent behind, the fear of ending up like their parents, the desire to not become their parents, the regret of not having a better childhood, the anger of not having as much

support as desired are all emotions the college-aged child of divorce now has to deal with.

Children of divorce often come from a less stable background financially. Where parents who remain married only had to afford one residence, parents who divorce have had to afford two residences. This alone creates an increased financial burden for parents who are divorced as opposed to parents whose marriages remain intact. Often this is not the only source of financial problems for divorced families. Many parents who are divorced find themselves in court time and time again, fighting over custody, child support, and ownership of material things previously owned by the couple jointly. These court costs can add up and create even more of a financial burden on the divorced family. Also, in most cases, mandated child support ends when the child turns 18, which can lead to one parent attempting to pay for their child's college costs by themselves. All of these increased financial burdens on divorced families can lead to a college-aged child of divorce who is worried about paying for their college education. According to The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, "A little less than 30 percent of the youngsters from divorced families received full or consistently partial support for college compared with almost 90 percent of youngsters in intact families" (Wallerstein, Lewis, Blakeslee 2000). This is an astounding statistic that really emphasizes the financial burden these college aged children of divorce are experiencing. Also, concerns about financial stability can lead to stress and more adaptation problems during the college years.

Definitions

Adaptation to college encompasses academic adjustment ability, social adjustment ability and personal emotional adjustment ability. Children of divorce defines a population of people whose parents were divorce when they were children.

Assumptions

This study assumes subjects will respond to the questionnaire in an open, honest, and thorough fashion. Also, the study assumes that no bias will be present in regards to the subjects' parent's marital status.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is that the sample is not random. The sample is at the mercy of volunteer Rowan University students. The findings are only generalizable to a small to medium sized state college or university. The adaptation to college that a student would have to go through would be different at either a larger or more prestigious school.

Summary

Chapter two will discuss research pertinent to college adaptation and children of divorce. Chapter three will discuss the methods used to obtain the data necessary for the study. Chapter four will discuss the outcome of the study. Chapter five will summarize the findings and relate them to real world issues.

Chapter Two

Numerous studies have looked at the affects of divorce on children of divorce. Researchers have examined everything from the affects divorce has on the children of divorce during their childhood to the affects the divorce has on children of divorce during their adulthood. Chapter two will highlight five different subtopics: Effects of divorce on children of divorce, effects of divorce on adult children of divorce, effects of college adaptation, effects of divorce on college-aged children of divorce and coping strategies for children of divorce.

Effects of Divorce on children

A recent study comparing 328 intact and 206 divorced families revealed that divorce is associated with internalized problems (i.e. emotional distress such as depression) and externalized problems (i.e. aggression and delinquent behavior) in both male and female children of divorce (Simons et. al., 1999). The study was comprised of two visits to each home, in which the family was administered questionnaires about family interactions and given tasks to complete while being videotaped for later analysis. The study found that boys and girls were more likely to be depressed and to experience developmental difficulties if their parents were divorced. Children of divorce also suffer an increased likelihood of experiencing problems with school, struggling with psychological well-being, having sex earlier, using drugs and committing illegal crimes (Simons et. al., 1999; Yongmin & Yuanzhang, 2002).

A significant study, “Family Environment and Adolescents’ Well-Being Before and After Parents’ Marital Disruption: A Longitudinal Analysis” surveying over 24,000 eight grade students and found that even before the divorce, children of divorce were more likely to have more “academic, psychological, and behavioral problems than peers whose parents remain married.” Findings also indicated that the affect the divorce has on the children can be predicted upon the amount of disruption that occurs either before the divorce or at the same time of the divorce (Sun, 2001).

For children of divorce, divorce is often accompanied by numerous other changes in their life including moving, changing schools, changing relationships with grandparents, changing degree of parental supervision, watching their parents remarry, economic hardship, often dropping mother head households below the poverty line (Amato & Keith, 1991; Ozawa & Yoon, 2003) and parental depression (Simons, et. al., 1999; Parish & Parish, 1991). Approximately one forth of divorced families where the mother has custody of the children will lead to the mother and children moving to a new location within four years of the divorce (Ford, 1997). In fact, research has found that children whose parents relocated after the divorce where significantly more likely to be considerably disadvantaged (Braver, Ellman & Fabricius, 2003). A meta-analysis examining parental divorce and adult well-being points out that “divorce is likely to be a stressful experience for children. It is usually preceded, and often followed by a period of interparental conflict” (Amato and Keith, 1991). Another study points out that economic hardship usually disrupts parenting practices in two-parent homes as well as single-parents homes with single-parent homes being more likely to experience the economic hardship (Simon, et. al., 1999). Children in single-parent homes also suffer

from “a decrease in parental attention, help and supervision, and may therefore be less likely to do well in school” (Amato & Keith, 1991).

Psychologist, E. Mavis Hetherington, author of For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered, studied 1,400 families and 2,500 children for 30 years. She discovered that while many children thrive after divorce, there are still 25% who have “serious social, emotional or psychological problems, as opposed to 10% of kids from intact families.” Hetherington points out that at first most children are angry and scared about their parents divorce, but after approximately two years after the divorce, most children “are beginning to function reasonable well again” (Corliss & McLaughlin, 2002; Agresti & Hetherington, 2002).

Judith S. Wallerstein, author of The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: The 25 Year Landmark Study, interviewed approximately 60 children of divorce over the time period of 25 years. Wallerstein points out that parental divorce is often simultaneous with other stressors, including violence in the home, high expectations of children such as becoming a caregiver for depressed parents or younger siblings, and loneliness due to absent parents. Wallerstein found that the affects of divorce on children of divorce are various. For example, children of divorce often form an alliance with one parent and become rude and mischievous towards the other parent. “At the breakup, one-fifth of the children in this study formed such alliances on behalf of one parent against the other.” Children of divorce are also more likely to partake in risk-taking behavior such as the use of alcohol and/or drugs earlier than children of intact families, with the use more likely to have significant interference on the child during high school years (Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000).

Effects of Divorce on Adult Children of Divorce

Effects of divorce can and often do extend into adulthood for children of divorce. Research has well established the fact that children of divorce are more likely to one day themselves experience divorce first hand (Mulder & Gunnoe, 1999). A recent study examining the effects of divorce on children of divorce in adulthood interviewed 1,500 respondents each year for 7 years. The study found that on reports of psychological well-being, children of divorce in adulthood are “almost consistently negative”, concluding that effects of parental divorce might very well last into adulthood (Glenn & Kramer 1985). Another study points out that “outcomes associated with parental divorce include psychological well-being (depression, low life satisfaction), family well-being (low marital quality and divorce), socioeconomic well-being (low educational attainment, income, and occupational prestige), and physical health.” Furthermore, children of divorce are more likely to suffer from “disorders severe enough to bring them to the attention of mental health practitioners“ (Amato & Keith, 1999). This study also further supported the conclusion that the effects of parental divorce can last into adulthood.

Research has also found that adult sibling relationships can be affected by parental divorce. For example, a study examining the “Relationships Between Parental Divorce and the Quality of Adult Sibling Relationships” surveying 264 college students found that subjects who experienced parental divorce between the ages of 8 and 19 “experienced significantly fewer positive feelings toward the sibling in adulthood, and recalled fewer positive feelings, beliefs, and behaviors toward the sibling in childhood compared to those subjects who experienced parental divorce before the age of 8 yrs, and also compared to control subjects from intact families” (Riggio, 2001).

McLanahan and Booth examined “Mother-only families: Problems, Prospects, and Politics” and found that children who grow up in families with a single-mother as head of the household are more likely to experience economic hardship. They found that these children who grow up in these homes are more likely to see economic hardship in their adult life as well. They conclude that “children in mother-only families are more likely to be poor in adulthood than children who live with both parents.” This is a striking finding in support of the affects of experiencing parental divorce lasting into the child’s adult life. Most children of divorce end up living in a mother-only household and therefore are more likely to experience this economic hardship (McLanahan & Booth, 1989).

In her 25 year long study, Judith S. Wallerstein discusses the affects of divorce on adults who experience parental divorce as children. She says, “Children of divorce need more time to grow up because they have to accomplish more: they must simultaneously let go of the past and create mental models for where they are headed, carving their own way.” Many children of divorce are lacking on good role models of marriages. There parents failed at marriage and they do not know how to succeed at it either. Wallerstein points out that “many of the lasting bad marriages in this group were as troubled or more troubled than the marriages their parents had escaped“ (Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee 2000).

Factors that Affect College Adaptability

Numerous factors have been examined to determine college adaptability. Studies have examined the race of undergraduate students (Hurtado, et. al. 1994; Gold, et. Al.,

1990), students involvement in extracurricular activities (Woo & Bilynsky, 1994), student's academic major decision (Smith & Baker, 1986), and student's religious orientation (Low & Handal, 1995). Findings suggest that college adaptation can be affected by numerous factors.

Effects of Parental Divorce on College Attendees

The effect parental divorce has on their college-aged children is astounding. A new Cornell University study found that "children who do not consistently live with two biological parents are only half as likely to ever attend a selective college, even after researchers take into account factors such as income and parent education." The study encompassed nearly 27,000 high school students originally interviewed in 1980 and then again in 1982, 1986, and 1992. Researchers controlled for "parents' income, employment, and education and student's grade point average, SAT scores, and participation in sports and other extracurricular activities." They found that "28 percent of students living with two biological parents were likely to apply to a selective college (the top 50 colleges in the nation), compared with 17 percent of students not living with two parents; 25 percent were likely to get in, compared with 14 percent of those living with one parent; and 2.2 percent of two-parent students were likely to ever attend a selective college, compared with only 1.1 percent of one-parent students." Children of Divorce are therefore half as likely to attend selective colleges compared to children of intact families (Lang, 1996).

A pertinent study examined "The Effects Absent Fathers Have on Female Development and College Attendance." The study defines an absent father as "those who

do not interact with their children on a regular basis and consequently do not play a significant role in their development.” The reasons a father can become absent include divorce, death and abandonment. The study found that “71% of high school dropouts are from fatherless homes” and “fatherless children are 20% less likely to attend college”. It is stated that there are two reasons that college attendance can be problematic in terms of absent fathers. First, single mothers are less likely to be able to afford college and second, fatherless females tend to “forego college and enter the workforce” in order to be able to make their own money to gain a sense of independence from men. “Women who have watched their mothers beg for money in court for child support vow never to be in that situation” (Krohn & Bogan, 2001).

Judith S. Wallerstein discovered that 29% of adult children of divorce received full or consistently partial monetary support for college, whereas 88% of adult children from intact families received this funding. This often puts a great burden on the child of divorce to find a way to pay for college him/herself, which can leave the student feeling stranded. One of Wallerstein’s subjects said:

When I enrolled, Mom told me that she would pay for half the year and that Dad would pay for the other half-tuition and board. So I go to register for the second semester and I couldn’t because the money hadn’t been sent. I called Dad and he told me that he’d had some temporary cash-flow problems and that Mom should pay it and he’d pay her back. Mom said she’d pay the tuition but she wouldn’t front the money for the dorm. So then I got a job to cover the room, but I was working nights and going to school and I got really tired and short of breath...I thought ‘Fuck it-if my going to college isn’t important to them then it isn’t important to me, either.’ I came back here and I’ve been working ever since (Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000).

Wallerstein comments on this topic. She says:

Children who would have received financial help for their college educations should not, at age eighteen, feel they’re paying for their

parents' divorce with the forfeiture of their future careers. This is an intolerable justice. The children will never forgive their parents for this betrayal, nor should they. If the parent cannot afford to pay for college, the child understands that just fine. But if a parent has the means to help pay tuition but says he or she is not 'obligated,' then the child has every right to be furious. (Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000).

Wallerstein's findings are significant when discussing children of divorce's motivation to attend as well as stay in college. In this study, 77% of adult children of divorce attempted college, compared to 100% of the adult children from intact families. Of the 77% adult children of divorce who attempted college 24% dropped out, as opposed to 11% dropping out in the 100% of adult children from intact families. All adult children from intact families received their high school diploma, while 4% of adult children of divorce did not finish high school.

Another recent study done on "Parental Divorce and Consequences of Drinking Among College Students" administered the Student Alcohol Questionnaire to 1894 undergraduate students from a mid-western university with a population of approximately 25,000 students. The questionnaire looked at amount of alcohol consumed as well as behavior as a consequence of alcohol consumption. Results indicated that although parental divorce did not affect amount of alcohol consumed, it did affect risk-taking behavior as a consequence of drinking, more specifically drinking and driving. Students whose parents were divorced were more likely to agree with consequences of drinking such as "driving after several drinks", "driving KNOWING had too much to drink", "drinking while driving", and "gotten a lower grade due to drinking too much". The study concludes that "these results suggest that experiencing the divorce of one's parents is related to negative consequences of drinking in college that are more subtly, yet more

problematic, than simply issues such as ‘amount of alcohol consumed’” (Billingham, et. al., 1999).

A recent study inspected the “Difference between college students from divorce and intact families.” This study had 500 undergraduate students as participants of which 25.8% were from divorced families. The study examined adjustment of the students including “sexual behavior, attitudes towards marriage, depression, self-esteem, and general psychological functioning (pathology, anxiety, expression).” Findings suggested that students from divorced families were more likely to have negative attitudes towards marriage and were more likely to have more sexual partners (Gabardi & Rosen, 1991). A later study also found that students from divorced families are more likely to have had more sexual partners, while also desiring “more sexual involvement when going steady than students from intact families” (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992). Another recent study, “Students’ Expectations and Optimism Toward Marriage as a Function of Parental Divorce”, surveyed 273 college students and discovered that “students from intact homes had more favorable expectations about the quality of their future marriage than students from single- and multiple divorce homes.” Although, students from divorced families were just as likely to expect to be married in their future (Boyer-Pennington, Pennington & Spink, 2001). Other studies have found similar results. For example, “The Relationship of Family Structure and Conflict to Levels of Intimacy and Parental Attachment in College Students” study found that students with divorced parents were more likely to experience less intimacy in romantic relationships (Ensign, Scherman & Clark, 1998), while “The Impact of Parental Involvement and Parental Divorce on Young Adults’ Intimate Relationships” study found that students from divorce families were

more likely to experience 'negative relationship outcomes' (Van Schaick & Stolberb, 2001). Also, "Long-Term impact of Parental Divorce on Optimism and Trust: Changes in General Assumptions or Narrow Beliefs?" study found that college-aged children of divorce reported "less trust of a future spouse and were less optimistic about marriage" (Franklin, Janoff-Bulman & Roberts, 1990).

College adjustment can be affected by the college students self-image. Goodman and Pickens studied "Self-Blame and Self-Esteem in College-Aged Children From Divorced Families" by surveying 296 undergraduate college students. Findings showed that students from divorced families were more likely to report lower self-esteem scores and more likely to report more self-blame than students from intact families (Goodman & Pickens, 2001). Similar findings were discovered in the "Family Climate, Family Structure and Self-Esteem in College Females" study, which indicated that being a child of divorce can affect college students self-esteem (Clifford & Clark, 1995).

A noteworthy study examining "The Impact of Parental Divorce on College Adjustment," surveyed 341 freshmen college student, of which 65 were from divorced parents. The subjects were mailed Borow's (1947) College Inventory of Academic Adjustment (CIAA). The questionnaire, consisting of six subscales and 90 questions, measures curricular adjustment, maturity of goals and levels of aspiration, personal efficiency, and mental health. Results indicated that no significant difference was found between students from divorced home and students from intact homes; a significant difference between "students whose parents divorced when they were either preschoolers (5 years old or younger), school-age (6-12 years old), or adolescents (13-18 years old)"; and no significant difference between students whose parents divorced and then their

custodial parents remarried and students whose parents divorced with their custodial parent remaining single. The significant finding of age of student at time of parental divorce being indicative of college adjustment revealed that students who were preschoolers when their parents divorced had significantly higher college adjustment than students whose parents divorced when they were school-age (Grant, et. al., 1993).

A recent study examined the “Perceived Psychological Separation of Older Adolescents and Young Adults From Their Parents: A comparison of Divorced Versus Intact Families.” The study had 160 freshmen college participants of which 38 reported coming from a divorced home. The study administered the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, the Goal Instability and Superiority Scales, the FACES-revised and the Attributional Style Questionnaire. The procedure consisted of administering a packet of the questionnaires, which included an informed consent form, a personal data sheet (to classify participants as coming from a divorced home or an intact home), the questionnaires and a debriefing sheet. The study found no significant difference on the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, a significant difference on the FACES-revised scale and a significant difference on the Attributional Style Questionnaire. The statistically significant findings on the FACES-revised revealed that students who come from homes of divorce are less likely to view their families as acceptable and less likely to receive family support. The statistically significance found on the Attributional Style Questionnaire showed that students who come from homes with divorced parents are less likely to see themselves as experiencing good events and less likely to attribute the good events to their own doing. The researchers concluded that although students from divorced families tend to adjust to college in a similar manner to students who came from

intact families, students from divorced families still could benefit from counseling that addresses how they view their families and how they view their responsibility to good events that occur in their lives. Although there was no significant difference on the SACQ, the results did not take into account the timing of the parental divorce or the sex of the student. Also, the personal data sheet appeared to be given before the questionnaires, creating a possible bias in the participants' responses (Allen, Stoltenberg & Rosko, 1990).

Other studies that have used the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire to examine effects of parents' marital status. For example, Lopez, Campbell and Watkins examined "The relation of parental divorce to college student development" and found no significant difference in college adaptation between children of divorce and children of intact families (1988). Schwitzer and Robbins replicate these findings in their study "Personality constructs as predictors of adjustment to college" (1986). A study conducted by Albert, titled "Physical and psychological separation of late adolescents from their parents as it relates to adjustment to college", found that students whose parents were still alive and married had higher Personal-Emotional Adjustment to college than students who had experienced parental death or students who had seen their parents divorce or separate (1988). Another study that used the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire was conducted by Flescher, Clingempeel and Stein in 1986. This study titled, "The adjustment to college of students from divorce-engendered mother-headed and stepfather families: A multimethod study", examined college adjustment and compared two types of post divorce families, those in which the mother remained single and those in which the mother remarried. The study did not find a significant difference

between these two groups but did find a relationship between the parent-child bond, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire results and the sex of the student. For example, if male students experienced a positive mother-son relationship in a mother-remarried family, then the male was more likely to have a higher score on the attachment subscale and the academic subscale of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. In the single-mother families, female students had a positive correlation between family involvement and attachment to college. Whereas, male students had a negative correlation.

Coping Strategies

The way an individual handles a life event depends greatly on the individual him/herself and the individuality of the event. Research has indicated that the resiliency of children of divorce can depend on the religious beliefs of the family (Shortz, Worthington & Everett, 1994), the gender of the child (Shook & Jurich, 1992), the post-divorce relationship with their parents (Clifford & Clark, 1995), the post-divorce marital status of their parents (Heyer & Nelson, 1993), their level of impulsivity (Lengua, et. al., 2000), and their personality characteristics (McIntyre, et. Al., 2003). The study, "Nosanow, Hage and Levin studied "Group Intervention with College Students from Divorced Families" (1999). This study encompassed "an 8-session psychoeducational counseling group for 5 college students from divorced families." According to the study, results indicated that group counseling can further psychological well-being of students from divorced families.

Conclusion

Divorce has astounding affects on children of divorce, adult children of divorce as well as college-aged children of divorce. Children of divorce are less likely to attend college and also less likely to receive financial help from their parents to attend college than children of intact families. Children of divorce are more likely to turn to risk-taking behaviors, such as drinking and driving and sexual promiscuity, during their college years than children of intact families. Children of divorce are also less likely to attend selective schools than children of intact families.

Chapter Three

Sample

The sample for this study included 95 undergraduate Rowan University students, which is a mid-sized New Jersey state school. Of the 95 undergraduate students 18 reported being from divorced families, 2 reported parental death, and 75 reported their parents still being married. For the purpose of this study the 2 reporting parental death were not used for analysis. Of the 18 from divorced families, 13 of their mothers remarried, 8 of their fathers remarried.

Measures

The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) was used to assess the students' adjustment to college. The test is broken into four subscales—Academic Adjustment (24 items), Social Adjustment (20 items), Personal-Emotional Adjustment (15 items) and Attachment (15 items). Due to the nature of the test, internal consistency reliability was used to judge reliability. The coefficient alpha ranged from .81 to .90 for the Academic Adjustment subscale; .83 to .91 for the Social Adjustment subscale; .77 to .86 for the Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale; .85 to .91 for the Attachment Adjustment subscale; and .92 to .95 for the Full scale. While each subscale is rating an individual aspect of college adjustment, they are all still assessing college adjustment. Therefore, it is understandable why correlations for validity are “large enough to

indicate that the subscales are indeed measuring a common construct, but small enough to support the conceptualization of that construct as having different facets as represented by the subscales.”

The SACQ was designed to account for the different aspects of college life. The Academic Adjustment subscale, including such statements as “I am finding my academic work at college difficult” and “I’m quite satisfied with my academic situation at college”, attempts to measure students’ motivation—“attitude toward academic goals and the academic work required,”—application—“how well motivation is being translated into actual academic effort,”—performance—“the efficacy or success of academic effort,”—and academic environment—“satisfaction with the academic environment and what it offers”. The social adjustment scale, which includes such statements as “I am meeting as many people and making as many friends as I would like at college” and “Lonesomeness for home is a source of difficulty for me now”, attempts to measure students’ general social adjustment—“extent and success of social activities”—students’ social adjustment in relation with other people—“involvement and relationships with other persons on campus”—students’ nostalgia—“dealing with social relocation and being away from home”—and students’ adjustment to the social environment—“satisfaction with the social aspect of the college environment”. The Personal-Emotional subscale, including such statements as “I have been feeling tense and nervous lately” and “I haven’t been sleeping very well lately”, attempts to measure students’ psychologically—“sense of psychological well-being”—and physically—“sense of physical well-being”. The final subscale, Attachment Adjustment, includes such statements as “I feel that I fit well as part of the college environment” and “I wish I were at another college or university”,

attempts to measure students' general attachment—"feelings about, or the degree of satisfaction with, being in college in general"—and students' adjustment with this college—"feelings about, or the degree of satisfaction with, attending the particular institution" (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

Design

The design of the study was created to assess if there is a difference between students who were children of divorce and students who were children of intact marriages in relation to their college adjustment. Students were visited by the experimenter in their residence halls or in their classrooms and were asked to fill out a survey. If the individual agreed, that individual became a subject in the experiment. Subjects were asked to first sign an informed consent agreement and then they were given the survey with a personal data sheet attached to it. The subjects were instructed to first fill out survey and then the personal data sheet in order to avoid any biases that might occur with the knowledge of the contents of the personal data sheet. Typically, the survey took 15 minutes to complete. After filling out the survey, subjects were thanked for their participation and given a disclosure letter further explaining the purpose of the study.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: children of divorce will exhibit more adaptation difficulties during college compared to children of intact families. Hypothesis 2: children of divorce will be more concerned about their financial stability than children of intact families during college. Hypothesis 3: children of divorce who experience parental divorce as a young child

(between birth and age 5) will exhibit less adaptation difficulties than children of divorce who experience parental divorce after the age of 5.

Analysis

Data was first divided into two categories: subjects whose parents divorced and subjects whose parents were still married. The group which reported parental divorce was then further broken into two categories: subjects who reported parental divorce occurring when the subjects were 5 years old and under and subjects who reported parental divorce occurring when the subject was 6 years old and over. Nine subjects reported experiencing parental divorce between birth and the age of 5, eight subjects reported experiencing parental divorce at the age 6 or older, and one respondent did not report the age. The respondent not reporting the age he/she experienced parental divorce was not included in either subdivision.

Independent sample T-tests were conducted to explore the possible differences between groups. First, children of divorce and children of intact families were compared on each measure of college adjustment. Then children of divorce experiencing parental divorce after age 5 were compared to children of divorce experiencing parental divorce between birth and age 5 were compared. Furthermore, children of divorce experiencing parental divorce after age 5 were then compared to children of intact families. A one-way ANOVA was then conducted to examine the potential differences between all 3 groups. Results are discussed in chapter 4.

Summary

Subjects from our sample were fairly representative of Rowan University's undergraduate population as a whole. It encompassed all grade levels, ethnicities, and sex. The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire was designed to assess students multifaceted adjustment to college, including academics, social, personal-emotional and attachment. The design eliminated as much bias as possible with a self-report measure.

Chapter Four

As stated in chapter one, there are 3 hypothesis for this study. Hypothesis 1 stated: children of divorce will exhibit more adaptation difficulties during college compared to children of intact families. Hypothesis 2 stated: children of divorce will be more concerned about their financial stability than children of intact families during college. Hypothesis 3 stated: children of divorce who experience parental divorce as a young child (between birth and age 5) will exhibit less adaptation difficulties than children of divorce who experience parental divorce after the age of 5.

Results for Hypothesis 1

Children of divorce and children of intact families were broken into two groups. Children of divorce were labeled group 1 and children of intact families were labeled group 2. Data was entered into SPSS and was analyzed with an independent-sample T-Test. Results can be viewed in table 4.1. The data's results indicated no significant difference between group 1 and group 2 on all categories of adaptation.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Personal-Emotional Adjustment			
Group 1 (Children of Divorce)	18	97.88889	16.40979
Group 2 (Children of intact families)	75	89.78670	19.38535
Attachment			
Group 1	18	109.7778	16.32233
Group 2	75	111.1733	15.01924
Social Adjustment			
Group 1	18	125.0000	26.53522
Group 2	75	134.4667	20.55075

Table 4.1.

Results for Hypothesis 2

In order to test children of divorce versus children of intact families degree of concern over financial stability, the results of the question, “I worry a lot about my college expenses”, were analyzed. Children of divorce and children of intact families remained divided into two groups to test the results of hypothesis 2. If a student responded that he/she agreed strongly with this statement his/her answer corresponded with a score of 1, however, if a student responded that they strongly disagreed with this statement then his/her response corresponded with a score of 9. Students responding somewhere along the continuum between agreeing strongly and disagreeing strongly, were given the corresponding score between 1 and 9. Findings can be viewed in table 4.2. Results indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Worry for College Expenses			
Group 1 (Children of divorce)	18	5.6111	3.05130
Group 2 (Children of intact families)	74	4.9189	2.62630

Table 4.2

Results for Hypothesis 3

Results for hypothesis 3 were gained by dividing children of divorce into two groups. Children of divorce who experienced parental divorce at age 5 or younger were labeled group 1-A and children of divorce who experience parental divorce after age 5 were labeled group 1-B. Findings can be viewed in table 4.3. Results indicated that there is a significant difference between the two groups in the category of attachment.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Personal-Emotional Adjustment			
Group 1-A (parental divorce birth-age 5)	9	99.7778	11.03152
Group 1-B (parental divorce age 6+)	8	94.1250	21.66918
Attachment			
Group 1-A	9	119.1111*	7.11415
Group 1-B	8	101.0000*	16.73320
Social Adjustment			
Group 1-A	9	136.3333	23.89561
Group 1-B	8	112.3750	26.64549

Table 4.3

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Further examination revealed a negative correlation between children's age at parental divorce and their attachment subscale score. The Pearson Correlation revealed a correlation of $-.571$, which is significant at the .05 level. The scatterplot displayed in figure 4.1 shows that on average the later the subjects experienced parental divorce the less attachment to college the student exhibited.

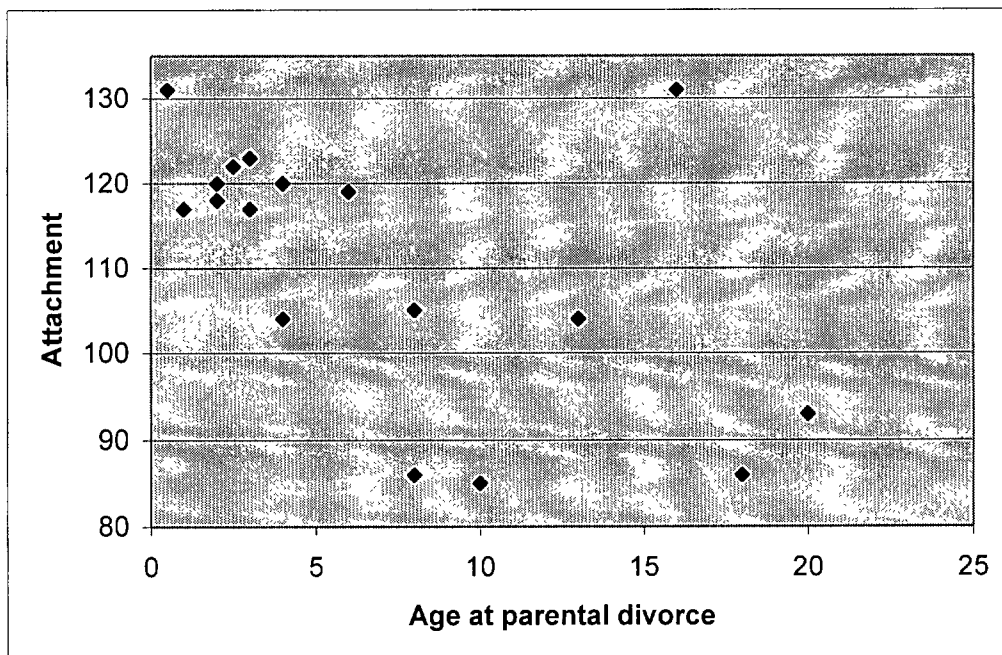


Figure 4.1

The two groups who experienced parental divorce were then compared to the group who never experienced parental divorce. Results can be viewed in figure 4.2 and

4.3. A significant difference was discovered between groups 2 and 1-B in the subscale of social adjustment.

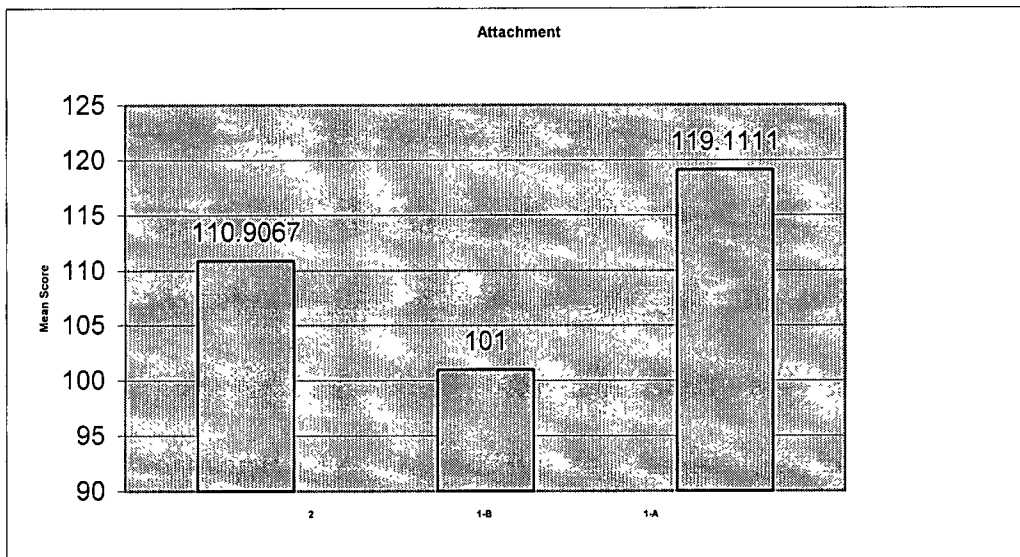


Figure 4.2

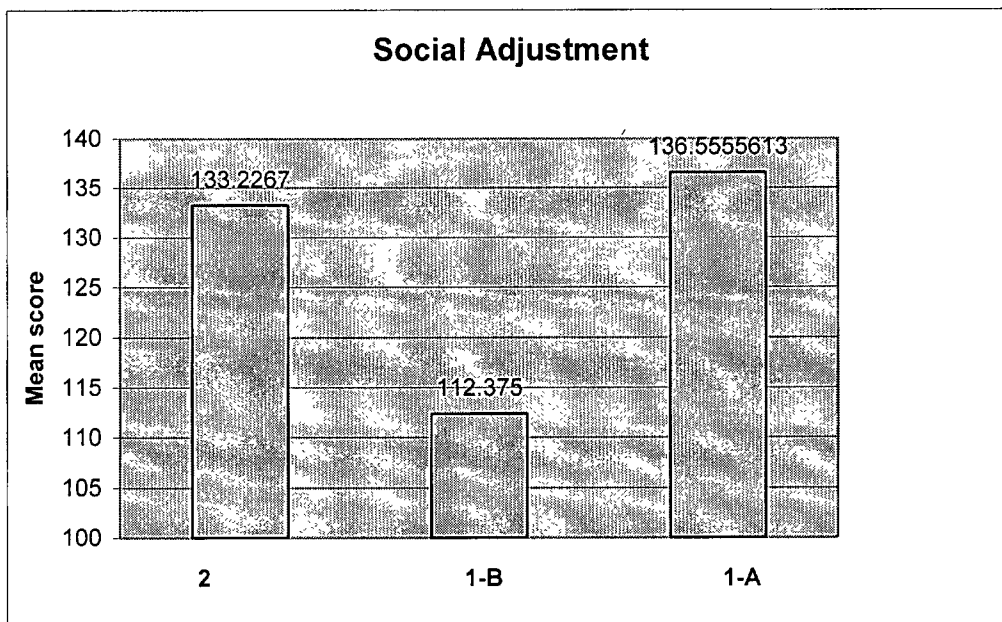


Figure 4.3

To further inspect these findings a one-way ANOVA was performed to compare group 1-A, group 1-B and group 2 on the attachment to college subscale and on the social adjustment to college subscale. Statistical significance was found between group 1-A and 1-B on the attachment subscale, which was consistent with the T-test results and

between groups 1-B and 2 on the social adjustment to college subscale. Group 1-A was combined with group 2 and compared to group 1-B to examine the difference between experiencing parental divorce at a prime age compared to experiencing parental divorce as an infant or not experiencing parental divorce at all. These results can be viewed in table 4.4. Results for this examination indicated a significant result in the categories of attachment and social adjustment. Another interesting finding was that if the children of divorce group was divided between those experiencing parental divorce at age 4 or younger and those experiencing parental divorce after age 4, as opposed to dividing the group around the age of 5, then more significant differences appeared in the subscale of social adjustment. The significant difference indicated that those who experienced parental divorce at age 4 or younger scored higher on the social adjustment subscale than those who experienced parental divorce after age 4. These results can be viewed in table 4.5.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Personal-Emotional Adjustment			
Group 1-A + Group 2	85	91.0941	18.89358
Group 1-B	8	94.1250	21.66918
Attachment			
Group 1-A + Group 2	85	111.9647*	14.48681
Group 1-B	8	99.6250*	18.92796
Social Adjustment			
Group 1-A + Group 2	85	134.5412**	20.69078
Group 1-B	8	112.3750**	26.64549

Table 4.4

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

**The mean difference is significant at the .01 level.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Adjustment			
Experiencing parental divorce between birth and age 3.	7	143.8571*	13.03110
Experiencing parental divorce at age 4 or older.	10	112.1000*	27.43254

Table 4.5

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Chapter Five

This paper extensively examined and compared children of divorce and children of intact families. Throughout history, few experts have debated whether being a child of divorce affects the individual; however, many experts have examined how long this affect might last. Studies have been contradictory: some finding and concluding that children of divorce see few affects into adulthood; however, other experts have found that some children of divorce do experience a lifetime of affects due to their parents divorce. This study examined whether the affects of being a child of divorce lasts into young adulthood. The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire was administered to 95 undergraduate Rowan University students. Results indicated that a primary effect of adjustment abilities depended on the age the college student experienced their parents' divorce.

Attachment Subscale Discussion

Children of divorce in this study experienced parental divorce between 6 months of age and 20 years of age. Results lend support that the age of a child when his/her parents' divorced is a primary indication of later adjustment to college. This study found a difference in attachment to college between children of divorce who experienced parental divorce at age 5 or younger and children of divorce who experience parental divorce after age 5. According to the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, the attachment subscale measures "a student's degree of commitment to educational-

institutional goals and degree of attachment to the particular institution the student is attending, especially the quality of the relationship or bond that is established between the student and the institution” (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Most interesting was the correlation found between age at parental divorce and attachment to college. The younger a child was when they experienced parental divorce, the more likely they were to have a higher score on attachment to college subscale. These findings are consistent with Grant, et. al. in “The Impact of Parental Divorce on College Adjustment”. As discussed in Chapter 2, this study found that “subjects who were preschoolers at the time of their parent’s divorce had significantly higher college adjustment scores than subjects who were school-age at the time of their parents divorce” (1993). This finding supports three different theories including:

1. The younger a child was when their parent’s divorced, the more likely their parents are to remarry and therefore the less likely they are to experience disadvantages that accompany a single parent household.
2. The younger a child was when their parent’s divorced, the more likely they are to have few memories of the pre-divorce family and therefore more likely to experience more attachment in their next phase of life.
3. The older a child was when their parent’s divorced, the more likely they were to have seen a parent leave and feel a sense of abandonment and therefore, they are less likely to want to abandon their family (as they see it) and less likely to attach to college.

These three theories will be further examined in this section.

Theory 1

Children of divorce who experienced parental divorce at a younger age are more likely to see their parents remarry. In fact, in this study out of the 9 members of the group composed of children whose parents divorced when they were 5 or younger, all 9 saw their mothers remarry and 6 out of 9 saw their fathers remarry. On the other hand, out of the 8 members who saw their parents divorce when they were 6 or older, 4 out of 8 saw their mothers remarry and 2 out of 8 saw their fathers remarry. Also supporting this theory is the fact that the one outlier in this study was a student who experienced their parent's divorce at the age of 16 and later saw both her parents remarry. She received a score of 131 on the subscale of attachment to college, which was 21.2222 points higher than the mean in the children of divorce group. If this subject followed the pattern of the inverse correlation between age and attachment to college, she would have scored somewhere below the mean. Also, the only other subject in the 6+ group, who saw both her parents remarry was the subject who was 6 years old when her parents divorced. She received a score of 119 on the subscale of attachment to college, which put her in the higher range for her age at the divorce. As discussed in chapter 2, Amato and Keith examined parental divorce and adult well-being and pointed out that single family households are more likely to experience economic deprivation and the children are more likely to "experience a decrease in parental attention, help, [and] supervision" (1991). Having their parents remarry can alleviate many of these possible negative side effects of growing up in a single parent home.

Theory 2

Children who experience parental divorce at a younger age are less likely to remember the pre-divorce family as well as the happenings surrounding the divorce. In this study children who experienced their parent's divorce at age 5 or younger had a higher mean attachment subscale than children whose parents remain married. A possible explanation of this would be that some children who never saw their parents divorce may have saw their parents in a bad marriage. This theory needs further examination due to the fact that this study did not investigate the type of marriage that the subjects from intact families witnessed.

Theory 3

Children of divorce who are older when their parents' divorce are more likely to see a parent leave and therefore they are also more likely to feel a sense of abandonment. Often, the absence of one parent also comes with more responsibility in the home for the older children including helping take care of younger siblings, possibly also helping take care of the parents who are experiencing a sense of loss themselves and increased responsibility with household duties including cooking and cleaning. In Judith Wallerstein's book, The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, Wallerstein describes children who become caregivers after their parent's divorce. She wrote:

One ten-year-old in this group got up regularly with her insomniac mother at midnight to watch television and drink beer. She frequently stayed home from school to make sure that her mother would not become depressed and suicidal or take the car out when she was drinking. A father told me how his twelve-year-old had packed his clothes, helped him to find an apartment, and arranged to do his shopping. She called him nightly to make sure that he had gotten home safely, and to beg him to stop smoking...One fourteen-year-old boy, whose mother abandoned the

family, stopped going to school and undertook all of this mother's responsibilities, including shopping, cooking, cleaning, and caring for his father who was in a state of collapse.

When it comes time for this type of child to go off to college, the family has the potential to experience a major sense of loss again. These children most likely feel guilty leaving their responsibilities to the home and family and therefore choose to not attend college or if they do choose to attend college they do not attach to college as equivocally as peers might.

Social Subscale Discussion

Children who experienced parental divorce at age 6 or later were less likely to score high on the social adjustment subscale than children whose parents were still married and children who experienced parental divorce at age 4 or later were less likely to score high on the social adjustment subscale than children who experience parental divorce before age 4 or children who never experienced parental divorce. According to the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, a lower score on the social subscale correlates with numerous findings including:

less participation in social activities in college; being viewed by independent evaluators as less qualified in terms of social skills; less success in separating from the home ties and establishing social autonomy; greater sense of loneliness, greater social avoidance and social distress, and less social self-confidence and social self-concept; less success in coping with less changes; less perceived social support; and perceptions of little opportunity for involvement in social activities" (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

A lower social adjustment to college for students who experienced their parents divorce at age 4 or later when compared to children whose parents are still married or children

whose parents divorced before age 4 can be examined in similar terms of attachment adjustment. Children who experienced their parents' divorce at this prime age are more likely to remember the events surrounding the divorce, which in-turn might leave them socially scarred by the memory. Also, they are more likely to feel a stronger sense of responsibility to the family of origin and therefore less likely to be prepared to socially expand in their college years.

Conclusions

Children of divorce grow up in very different homes than children of intact families. This study examined and concluded that parental divorce after the child's age of 5 can have a significant impact on the child's later social adjustment and attachment to college. Most significant was the finding that children's age at parental divorce is inversely correlated to attachment to college.

Recommendations for Future Research

Due to the small sample size of children of divorce, a replication study should be conducted. When the children of divorce group was broken into two, each group only had 8 and 9 subjects respectively. This study did have interesting findings, however, strong conclusions were difficult to come by due to the small sample and only simple personal information on the subjects. In a replication study, the marriages that were still intact should be further investigated. Researchers should look at the quality of the intact marriage, which could also be related to college adaptation.

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