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EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON LEVELS OF
CONFLICTUAL INDEPENDENCE IN
LATE ADOLESCENCE

by
Jill Fredricks

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
1999

Approved by

Professor

Date Approved 5/3/99

ABSTRACT

Jill Fredricks

Effects of Divorce on Levels of Conflictual Independence in Late Adolescence
1999

Dr. John Klanderman, Advisor

Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of divorce on late adolescents' levels of conflictual independence during the separation-individuation process.

The sample consisted of 94 undergraduate students from Rowan University in southern New Jersey. This was a between subjects research design which involved a self-report inventory. Levels of conflictual independence were measured by the conflictual independence subscale (CI) of Hoffman's Psychological Separation Inventory, a 138 question inventory which asks questions about one's relationships with the mother and father.

The statistical test used to analyze the data in this study was a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) as well as two nonparametric tests. Results of the MANOVA showed no significance for the suggested relationships between parental marital status, gender, and levels of conflictual independence. However, gender and percentiles of father scores were found to be significantly correlated when a Kendall's tau-c was calculated.

Factors which may have influenced the study were sample size, age of the child at the time of divorce, place of residence, testing conditions, and type of measure used.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of divorce on conflictual independence during adolescent separation-individuation. A MANOVA showed no significance for the suggested relationships between parental marital status, gender, and conflictual independence scores. Gender and father score were significantly correlated when a nonparametric test was performed.

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CHAPTER I

Adolescence is a time of incredible change. Psychological separation from one's parents is an aspect of maturation that can have varying levels of difficulty. There are many factors that contribute to how much anger or resentment one has toward their parents during the process of separation-individuation. One major factor of today's world is divorce. Research has shown that divorce can have many negative effects on the children that are involved. Some of these effects may be carried over into adolescence and even into adulthood, complicating the separation process. In the view of separation-individuation, the individual's achievement of healthy personal adjustment is highly dependent on their ability to psychologically separate from the parents (Hoffman, 1984). It is important that divorce be studied as a possible inhibitor to this ability.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the level of conflictual independence during the separation-individuation process in late adolescents from divorced families as well as late adolescents from intact families and to assess any existing differences. The research will also try to determine whether the greatest amount of conflictual independence is achieved by males or females in both the intact and the divorced family groups.

Hypothesis

The general hypothesis for this study is that a sample of undergraduate

students from Rowan University who come from intact families will have more conflictual independence in their relationship with each parent than those from divorced families. This includes adolescents whose parents have recently divorced or are currently going through a divorce and those whose parents divorced several years ago. It is further hypothesized that levels of conflictual independence will be different for each gender in both groups. Finally, it is hypothesized that there will be an interaction between gender and parental marital status for levels of conflictual independence. The researcher believes that this research will further support previous literature on the subject.

Theory

Emphasis on the role of separation-individuation, more generally referred to as psychological separation, began with psychoanalytic theory many decades ago. This theory strongly emphasizes the importance of psychological separation and individuation during early and late adolescence. "In this view, the individual's drive toward healthy personal adjustment is critically dependent on his or her ability to separate from the parents and gain a sense of identity as a separate individual" (Hoffman, 1984, p. 170).

The infancy stage of separation-individuation involves learning to act independently of the mother and to cognitively view oneself as a separate person. These two developmental tasks are interdependent. It has been explained that if the dependency needs of a young child are not met and the child's internalized view of the parent is impaired, the child may be left with an inner yearning to be loved. This may then be obscured by feelings of rejection, anger, resentment, and guilt (Hoffman, 1984).

There are three main aspects of the separation-individuation phase of the first three years of life. These are behavioral independence,

representational or cognitive differentiation, and emotional independence; the latter resulting in conflictual emotions if the process is not completed smoothly or successfully. In 1984, Hoffman attempted to derive four separate aspects of the process of psychological separation during adolescence from the infancy / early childhood phase. Behavioral independence can be compared to functional independence in the adolescent. This is the ability to manage one's own practical and personal affairs without the help of one or both of the parents. The cognitive differentiation aspect is depicted as attitudinal independence which involves having one's own set of beliefs, values, and attitudes and the image of oneself as being unique from both parents. The aspect of emotional independence is broken into two separate aspects in adolescence: emotional and conflictual independence. The first involves freedom from an excessive need for approval, closeness, togetherness, and emotional support in relation to the parents. The latter is defined as freedom from excessive guilt, anxiety, mistrust, responsibility, inhibition, resentment, and anger in relation to the mother and father (Hoffman, 1984).

This research is based on the theoretical framework of the Psychological Separation Inventory created by Jeffrey A. Hoffman (1984). The inventory consists of four separate subscales, one for each of the aspects previously discussed. This study was primarily concentrated on the Conflictual Independence (CI) subscale, although the entire inventory was administered. Hoffman designed his research in an attempt to conceptualize the different aspects of adolescent psychological separation from parents. His results showed a positive relationship between conflictual independence and adequate personal adjustment in college students (1984).

Individuation for adolescents from divorced families can be rather threatening due to its identification with the marital dissolution. The adolescent

may feel that they are not able to psychologically separate from the parents smoothly, and that their existing relationship with them may be dissolved in the process (Perl, 1997). This study uses divorce as a factor in order to delineate any differences or further complications in the separation-individuation process between adolescents from divorced families and those from intact families.

Definitions

separation-individuation process- the process through which an adolescent becomes psychologically separate from the parents and gains a sense of identity as a separate individual.

conflictual independence- freedom from excessive guilt, anxiety, mistrust, responsibility, inhibition, resentment, and anger in relation to the mother and father.

intact family- a family in which the child's biological parents are legally married and living together.

divorced family- a family in which the child's biological parents are legally divorced and living separately.

Assumptions

It was assumed that adolescents that came from intact families had not experienced some other type of family trauma that may have complicated the separation-individuation process. It was also assumed that adolescents from divorced families had also not gone through some other traumatic experience which would have complicated separation aside from the parental divorce.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study was that the sample was not random. The

subjects were primarily lowerclassmen and psychology students from Rowan University. Another limitation was that parental remarriage was not taken into account in this study. This factor may have had some affect on parent / child relationships.

Overview

Parental divorce does not have to be an inhibitor to one's conflictual independence. To better address this issue, there should be more insight as to how parental relationships affect the process of separation-individuation and how difficulties can be alleviated. Chapter 2 of this study contains a literature review. The information provided highlights many of the effects that divorce can have on adolescent children as well as the many aspects of the separation-individuation process. In chapter 3, the design of the study and how it was administered are discussed further. An analysis of the results is contained in chapter 4. In chapter 5, the researcher discusses the results and gives implications for future research.

CHAPTER II

This chapter is broken down into three sections of research: separation-individuation in adolescence, effects of divorce on adolescents, and research which combines the two areas. Within each section, one or two studies dealing specifically with that topic will be discussed in depth. In addition, other studies related to that topic will be mentioned. It is the researcher's intention to provide a broad overview of the first two topics and to discuss the important ways in which they relate to each other.

Separation-Individuation in Adolescence

Hoffman's Study

In Psychological Separation of Late Adolescents From Their Parents, Jeffrey A. Hoffman attempted to outline the different aspects of psychological separation during adolescence. He used the Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI), which he constructed himself, as well as the Personal Adjustment Scale of the Adjective Check List (ACL), and two global ratings regarding problems with academic courses and adult relationships to conduct his research. His sample consisted of 75 female and 75 male college students (Hoffman, 1984).

Some items for the PSI were developed originally by the author and his colleagues. Others were items that were selected from the Emancipation Questionnaire for college students by Sherman (1946) and rewritten in terms of psychological separation from the mother and father. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used allowing the subjects to rate the statements anywhere from *not at all*

true of me (0) to *very true of me* (4). “The utilization of the Likert-type format was decided on to allow subjects the flexibility to state the degree to which they felt the item was true of them because the scales of psychological separation are thought to reflect continuous dimensions” (Hoffman, 1984, p. 173).

The results of the study showed that greater emotional independence from parents was related to better academic adjustment, whereas greater conflictual independence was related to better adjustment in love relationships. This was true for both males and females. Greater conflictual independence was also related to better academic adjustment in males, whereas greater emotional independence from fathers was related to better adjustment in love relationships for females. Conflictual independence from both parents appeared to be related to better overall personal adjustment in females. Results also show a relationship between greater perceived attitudinal similarity with both parents and better personal adjustment in both genders and better adjustment in love relationships for males (Hoffman, 1984).

Hoffman’s findings on conflictual independence led to further ideas that ongoing conflictual feelings toward one’s parents may lead to feelings of mistrust, personal inadequacy, or insecurity in intimate relationships and may interfere with an adolescent’s ability to freely participate in a give-and-take love relationship. In relation to the results on emotional independence, it was inferred that an adolescent’s greater need for emotional support from the parents in some way interferes with his or her ability to be successful academically. According to the results on attitudinal independence, it was inferred that greater attitudinal similarity to parents may facilitate a better relationship between the adolescent and the parents which may lead to the result of better personal adjustment. “Extremely different attitudes may reflect a rebellious reaction stemming from a lack of conflictual independence” (Hoffman, 1984, p. 177).

Family Systems Theory

It is argued in systems therapy that a sense of identity is best fostered when the family setting allows for individuality while promoting connectedness. According to Minuchin (1974) clear generational boundaries foster healthy development in adolescents. “Adaptive family functioning is compromised when boundaries become closed or rigid on one hand so that individuals feel isolated, or diffuse on the other, so that although members feel close to each other, differentiated behaviors and cognitions are not allowed” (Perosa, Perosa, & Tam, 1996). Support for this idea was given by Perosa, et.al., (1996) in their study on family structure and its contribution to identity development.

Gender Differences

One particular differentiation mentioned in both family theory and research is that females are at a higher risk for experiencing boundary dissolution problems because of the care giver role that women are socialized to play. The most problematic boundary is that which exists between a father and his daughter. Research indicates that when females come from families that have dissolved boundaries and they are estranged from their fathers, they are more likely to be in the moratorium or diffused status. This means they have not been able to completely reach the identity stage (Perosa, et. al.).

The idea of continuing connection with the parents has been argued to be more particularly true in female development. For example, women tend to define themselves in relation to others, whereas men tend to come off as being more independent and separate from others (Hauser & Levine, 1993).

In a study by Margaretha Lucas (1997), psychological separation, as measured by the PSI, was related to identity development in adolescence, as measured by the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status. Female

college students scored lower than male college students on functional and emotional independence. Her results supported the idea that females view themselves as less capable of directing personal affairs without assistance from their parents. In addition, levels of conflictual independence were related to high levels of identity exploration in men. For both men and women, the processes of ego identity development and individuation were seen as involving change and growth while maintaining connections with the parents (Lucas, 1997).

Adjustment, Attachment & Self-Esteem

In a study by Alfred Smith (1994), Hoffman's PSI was implemented to show a relationship between separation-individuation and college adjustment. Females and males who scored higher on positive feelings of separation from parents, as measured by the conflictual independence subscale, tended to report higher levels of college adjustment (Smith, 1994).

Kathryn Clauss (1995) also studied college adjustment in relation to separation individuation, as well as in relation to family competence, parental attachment and self-esteem. Her findings showed family dynamics, parental attachment, and separation-individuation had a significant relationship to self-esteem. Conflictual independence from the father, as measured by the PSI, contributed to emotional adjustment in college, whereas conflictual independence from the mother was found to be a significant contributor to self-esteem (Clauss, 1995). Research by Edgerton (1997) also shows support for the idea that secure attachment to parents is associated with better social and emotional adjustment to college.

Problem Solving

In a study by Fraser and Tucker (1997), a significant association existed

between individuation level and problem solving abilities. In general, people who have good problem solving skills tend to have more confidence in their decision making as do those who are highly individuated. This observation led to the idea that the two groups may share certain characteristics. It was inferred that perhaps parents who allow their children to fully individuate also promote a sense of responsibility, self-confidence, and optimism that leads to their greater ability to problem solve (Fraser & Tucker, 1997).

Problems in Separation-Individuation

Research has shown that as adolescents seek to raise their level of independence, they perceive less warmth and greater conflict with their parents (Glenn, 1995). These feelings of conflict may be characterized by internal anger and distrust of the parents. Adolescents who maintain internal working models characterized by distrust and anger run a high risk of having difficulty in future relationships. In addition, these negative forms of attachment may predispose the adolescents to serious adjustment difficulties, including acting out and delinquency (Hauser & Levine, 1993).

Complications during the separation-individuation process can also lead to other problems. In 1997, Jason Edgerton found support for a relationship between attachment and pathology. His results showed that a secure adult attachment was related to less pathology in separation-individuation, whereas attachment of an occupied and fearful nature was associated with greater pathology (Edgerton, 1997). Research by Wichman (1997) and Wiles (1997) showed a relationship between separation-individuation and eating disorders. "Strong associations with negative family interaction and perceived parental relationships were found to correlate with eating disorder symptoms" (Wiles, 1997, p.1).

In the case of parental alcoholism, according to Crespi and Sabatelli

(1997), adolescents are constantly subjected to psychological maltreatment and dysfunction. "Children of alcoholics often play roles within the family of origin that serve the needs of the family but have the potential to disrupt their own functioning as adults" (Crespi & Sabatelli, 1997, 408). Parental alcoholism is such a powerful influence that it can distort several aspects of the adolescent's life, such as attachments, professional and personal relationships, psychological well-being, problem-solving strategies, and functional affective styles. Because finding emotional distance is hard for these adolescents, individuation is very difficult. Parents may not want the adolescent to distance themselves because they may rely on the child as a crutch or tool to support their dependent behaviors. (Crespi & Sabatelli, 1997). The adolescent's lack of individuation will further inhibit their future relationships because they will be forced to bring with them into the relationships all of the unresolved issues resulting from the family system (Crespi & Sabatelli, 1997).

In the next section of this chapter, the effects of divorce and their implications for the individuation process will be discussed in depth. Many of these problematic effects will be similar to those just stated for parental alcoholism. This supports the idea that all problems existing within the family system can have detrimental effects on adolescent separation-individuation.

The Effects of Divorce on Adolescents

On the whole, adolescents experience divorce differently than children. They are less likely to direct blame at themselves for the divorce because they are no longer as egocentric as they were in childhood. Furthermore, they have progressed further cognitively and are better able to understand what is occurring. Another factor that may help them in dealing with the transition is a deeper involvement in peer relationships (Hines, 1997). Although, divorce can be a big interruption to these newly forming peer relationships (Levy-Warren,

1996).

There are many facets of divorce that may hinder the adjustment and psychosocial development of the adolescent. Some of these are conflict between the parents (before, during, and after), loss of or lessened contact with a parent, decreased economic support, and possible diminished parental effectiveness. Parents may become less effective in their role because of their own difficulties in dealing with the divorce. They may be more likely to be physically or psychologically unavailable. Other factors that have an effect after the divorce / separation takes place are geographic moves, addition of stepsiblings, and extended family members (Hines, 1997; White, Brinkerhoff, & Booth, 1985). These all take the form of added stress to the adolescent of divorce and the parent-child relationship.

Immediate Negative Effects

Early adolescence is marked by an increase in problem behavior. This is seen even more so in children from divorced families. A high percentage of the adolescents in residential homes come from divorced families. It has also been noted that there is a greater chance for antisocial behavior in adolescents of divorce. Lastly, in comparison to those from intact families, adolescents from divorced families have sought professional help twice as often (Hines, 1997). These effects may be due to the fact that normative adolescent perceptions, conflicts, preoccupations, and responsibilities are sometimes put off because of the present marital discord / separation (Hines, 1997; Levy-Warren, 1996). Parental relationship problems may also increase the adolescent's difficulty in investing in relationships, and believing that they can be stable and faithful. In essence, these adolescents are more doubtful when it comes to their present and future relationships because they have witnessed marital conflict firsthand (Hines, 1997; Spruijt & de Goede, 1997; Summers, Forehand, Armistead, &

Tannenbaum, 1998).

In a study by Francis and Evans (1997) on 13-15 year olds, adolescents of divorce were noted to have lower personal well-being, to worry more about relationships, to hold less positive attitudes toward school and work, and to be more longing to be able to turn to others for advice. For children of divorce, who were 16 or younger when the divorce occurred, parental divorce was associated with poor parent / child relationships, high emotional distress / problem behavior, seeking of psychological help, and dropping out of high school (Hines, 1997). The evidence of lower academic achievement may be due to fewer resources or diminished parental help, and more distractions, most likely in the form of marital conflict (Forehand, Biggar, & Kotchick, 1998). In a study by Forehand, Armistead and David (1997), adolescents of divorce showed poorer functioning across the domains of prosocial competence and cognitive competence, as well as both externalizing and internalizing problems. Lower self-esteem, behavior problems, and depression in adolescents were also linked to downward mobility as a consequence of divorce (Wadsworth, 1986).

Long-Term Effects

Some of the observed long-term effects of divorce on adolescents are a tendency to have children at a younger age, to get married young, and to divorce (Cherlin, McRae, & Chase-Landsdale, 1998; Hines, 1997; Spruijt & de Goede, 1997). Spruijt and de Goede (1997) have also noted in their research that these adolescents also tend to leave home earlier, cohabituate earlier, break up relationships more often, and to have a more negative opinion of their relationships. According to Wadsworth (1986), adolescents of divorce were seen as being at a disadvantage because they more often showed signs of low self-esteem, which led to lower academic achievement. This, in the long run, led

to a lower income in early adulthood than adolescents from intact families.

Gender Differences

In the study of early adolescents and divorce, more negative effects were displayed by boys. This may be because males were more likely to externalize their feelings, whereas girls manifested their stress in different, more internal ways. On the contrary, girls also had the tendency to become increasingly confrontational with mothers in later adolescence (Hines, 1997). Dunlap and Burns (1995) also showed evidence for change in effect over time. The effect of greater vulnerability in males was shown in childhood, whereas greater susceptibility to depression was displayed in females during adolescence. Similar to the effects of divorce were those of severe marital conflict in the form of marital violence. An abusive parental relationship was associated with poorer father-child relationships for daughters but not for sons, whereas poorer mother-child relationships were associated with parental abuse for both males and females (McNeal & Amato, 1998).

Marital Conflict and Family Cohesiveness

More recently, research shows support for the idea that chronic marital conflict may lead to more adversity than divorce. The parent / child relationship is seen as being a more important and accurate predictor of maladjustment for the adolescent (Dunlap & Burns, 1995; Hines, 1997; Spruijt & de Goede, 1997; Tasker, 1996.). There has also been the speculation in a few studies that intense conflict within the family may have adverse effects on the children involved even before a divorce takes place (Hines, 1997). In the present study, the researcher believes that adolescents from divorced families have a higher level of conflict in their family system, hence they will exhibit more negative effects, or more specifically, less conflictual independence.

The level of conflict that exists during and after a marriage is an important predictor for the amount of impact it may have on adolescents (Ambert, 1997). One study showed that when multiple risk factors are present, for example, divorce is accompanied by the adolescent separation phase, downward mobility, and remarriage, there is more potential for negative effects on the adolescent. Studies show that an increase from 3 to 4 risk factors can have severely negative effects on psychosocial adjustment (Forehand, et. al., 1998). Research also shows that when remarriage occurs during adolescence, problems in family relationships and adolescent adjustment may be sustained for longer periods of time. Furthermore, "relationships in stepfamilies are less cohesive and more distant than relationships in first marriages" (Hines, 1997, 381). In a study by Rubenstein, Hatton, Kasten, Ruben, and Stechler (1998), adolescents who came from divorced families and / or sensed a low degree of family cohesiveness were more likely to be suicidal. It was their idea that parental divorce and the perception of less cohesiveness led to larger degrees of stress in the adolescent, which ultimately led to suicidal behavior.

Post-Divorce Parental Differences

Even though there is very little literature on custodial fathers, it has been noted that they start off as being very permissive and then gradually become more and more restrictive. The father-child relationship has been shown to have a very strong impact on children of divorce from the adolescent through the early adult years (Hines, 1997). Father-daughter residency has been said to display the most difficulty for the facilitation of adolescent adjustment (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996).

Better functioning has been shown to exist in two-parent households more often than in mother-custody households, and even more often than in father-custody households (Hines, 1997). In her study on heterosexual

relationships, Fiona Tasker (1996) found that the absence of the father-child relationship increased adolescents' levels of involvement in heterosexual relationships, possibly due to feelings of needing to compensate for the loss of the father figure. In addition, negative maternal relationships were associated with less involvement. This could be explained by feelings of unworthiness resulting from a lack of sufficient love or attention from the mother (Tasker, 1996).

The Effects of Divorce on the Adolescent Separation-Individuation Process

During adolescence, one is faced with specific developmental tasks. Some of these are psychological, involving separation from the parents and family, as well as forming a clear and consolidated sense of self. The normative response to these tasks is one involving emotional crisis and upheaval. Separation-individuation used to be thought of as completely breaking away from one's parents. Due to a reevaluation of the theory which involves more feminist views, it is now seen as involving realignments in the family relationships (Hines, 1997).

Research has supported the idea that parental marital status and the parent-adolescent relationship are both related to adolescent well-being (McCurdy & Scherman, 1996). The parent-adolescent relationship has been seen as one of the main sources of support for the adolescent. It has also been noted that a positive parent-adolescent relationship can ameliorate the negative effects of divorce on adolescents (Hines, 1997). Research has also supported the idea that individuation, itself, is a crucial aspect of adolescence and that it mediates the impact of parental and family factors on later adjustment (Frederick, 1997).

McCurdy and Scherman's Study

In Effects of family structure on the adolescent separation-individuation process, by McCurdy and Scherman (1996), the effects of family structure on college students from three different groups were investigated. These groups were: intact; divorced / mother-custody / no remarriage; and divorce / mother-custody / remarried. The subjects were 90 undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 24 who were single. Instruments used were the Parental Attachment Questionnaire, the Conflictual Independence subscale of the PSI, the Private Self-Consciousness Subscale of the Self-Consciousness Scale, the Ego Identity Scale, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (McCurdy & Scherman, 1996).

Results of the study showed evidence that divorce may result in reduced attachment to the noncustodial parent. In this study, since both divorced situations were mother-custody, the reduced attachment was related to fathers. Evidence was also shown that adolescents from divorced or remarried families may have a greater amount of conflictual dependencies on the noncustodial father. No differences in ego development were found between the intact group and the two divorced groups. Self-esteem was found to be highly related to ego identity development, in that successful formation of ego identity led to positive self-esteem. Lower levels of self-esteem were associated with poor attachment to the father and with lower levels of conflictual independence from the father. It is suggested that a conflictual relationship with at least one parent, whether it be the mother or father, custodial or noncustodial parent, can decrease the adolescent's chances for adequate personal adjustment. No gender effects were observed in this study (McCurdy & Scherman, 1996).

Effects on College Students

In studies dealing with college students, it has been speculated that

divorce may diminish functional and emotional dependencies while increasing the amount of anger, resentment, and conflict (Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1988). In a study by Lopez, Campbell, and Watkins (1988), subjects reported having greater emotional, functional, and attitudinal independence from their families, as well as a lower degree of conflictual independence from fathers. No effect on college adjustment was seen for the factor of divorce on its own, but higher degrees of stress were displayed when the divorce took place right before the adolescent's commencement of college or during their college career. In a study by Hoffman and Weiss (1987), negative effects were even shown for college students who lived on campus (outside the family home) due to conflictual relationships in the family. In addition, higher conflictual dependence was related to increased emotional problems for the adolescent.

According to McCurdy and Scherman (1996), high conflictual dependence was associated with lower personal adjustment in college students. In addition, college students whose parents became divorced during their childhood or adolescence were more likely to have system support failures. Finally, college students were seen to have more conflictual dependencies on the father than the other family members who were not attending college (McCurdy & Scherman, 1986).

Gender Differences

In a study of first-year college students involving parental attachment and family structure, Kenny and Donaldson (1991) found that college women were, overall, more attached to parents. These women also had higher self reported ratings of self-competency and psychological well-being. Parental support factors were associated with adaptive functioning as well (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991). In conjunction with these findings, it has been noted that females are particularly sensitive to parental marital conflict (Hoffman & Weiss, 1987).

Scores on the father independence subscale were significantly higher for females than for males from intact families, as reported by Lopez, et. al., (1988). In addition, females from divorced families scored higher on most aspects of independence than those from intact families. This implies the exception of conflictual dependencies on the father which have been seen as having more negative effects on female, rather than male, college adjustment (Lopez, et. al., 1988).

Studies also reveal certain information that points to negative effects for males as well. Ember (1995) found support for the idea that males from divorced families appear to depend more heavily on their fathers than males from intact families, as measured by Hoffman's PSI. This tendency was believed to possibly be a result of the males' idealized relationships with their fathers rather than the actual father-son relationships (Ember, 1995). Jennings, Salts, and Smith (1991) reported that males, in comparison to females, from divorced families had less favorable attitudes toward marriage.

Parenting Style

Positive developmental outcomes for adolescents of divorce, in either custodial situation, have been associated with specific parenting styles such as parental warmth, consistent limit setting, and democratic parent-child interaction (Hines, 1997; McCurdy & Scherman, 1996). In Gnaulati's study of paternal bonding and its influence on adolescence (1996), "fathering high in warmth and care, as well as fathering low in overprotection, were found to be independently associated with subjects mature overall separation-individuation...(3410).

When one or both parents is too authoritarian and communication is poor, the result may be the adolescent's fear of parental rejection. On the other hand, it is also not healthy to be too permissive because the effects can be even worse. It is suggested that the parent or parents find a point between the two

extremes in order to better facilitate adolescent adjustment (Saintonge, Achille, & Lachance, 1998). Family styles that involve triangulation or parentification of the adolescent also make it more difficult for the adolescent to individuate themselves. They may begin to relate their own separation as a “divorce” from the parent or parents which is very unhealthy (Perl, 1997). Adolescent females in families with sound structures have healthier separation-individuation than those from families with compromised structures (Bowman, 1996).

Fathers as Facilitators

The father has been seen as a facilitator of separation-individuation for both female and male adolescents. In addition, both have been seen to have significantly decreased contact with non-custodial fathers after divorce (McCurdy & Scherman, 1996). Saintonge, et.al. (1998) noted that the father is needed to aid the male adolescent in breaking away from the mother. In the case of absent fathers, a Big Brother was also able to facilitate this process by forming a new stable relationship with the male adolescent which allowed him to regress and resolve infantile conflicts (Saintonge, et. al., 1998).

In her discussion of the female adolescent separation-individuation process, Perl (1997) found that the father’s gender specific role was in facilitating separation from the mother for daughters. The father-daughter bond is seen as providing a “bridge” to attachments outside the family (Perl, 1997, 84). In the case of absent fathers, females are often seen acting out behaviorally in sexual, aggressive, and self-destructive ways. It is speculated that this occurs because the adolescent would like to turn toward her mother for comfort but that would be in conflict with her breaking away from the maternal bond. When she does not have a father to go to for support in separation, she is led to inappropriate ways of coping (Perl, 1997).

In a study by Brady (1995), the greatest predictor of differences between

intact and divorced families was the father attachment variable. This finding suggested that there is a significantly strong need for a continuing emotional, as well as physical involvement with the non-custodial father after divorce occurs. In addition, an association has been observed between a perceived close relationship with the non-custodial father and fewer internalizing problems in the adolescent (McCurdy & Scherman, 1996).

Effects in Early Adulthood

Research supports the view that the negative effects of divorce on children can be seen through adolescence and into young adulthood (O'Conner, Allen, Bell, & Hauser, 1996). These negative effects can be seen in the areas of psychological well-being, family well-being, socioeconomic well-being, and physical health (Amato & Keith, 1991). Young adults who reported being closer to their parents also scored high on levels of psychological well-being. Young adults who reported being closer to their dads, regardless of the mother-child relationship, also reported being happier, more satisfied, and less distressed (Amato, 1994). Young adults whose parents had a rather high degree of conflict in their marriage were more likely to have less favorable attitudes toward marriage than those who experienced less conflict in the home (Jennings, et. al., 1991).

Added Risk Factors

Separation anxiety from the family and parental marital conflict have been associated with psychological symptoms (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991). It is possible, and more frequent than one might think, that divorce can further be complicated by other factors that put the adolescent at an even greater risk. An example of this would be paternal alcoholism or extreme conflict. In 1996, Bowman found that "family structure was determined to be an important

mediating variable in the impact of paternal alcoholism on adolescent development” (4051). Due to adolescents’ progressive ego development, evidence has shown that positive, constructive relationships with parents for adolescents in the cases of paternal alcoholism and intense conflict after divorce can exist (Hines, 1997).

Summary

Throughout this chapter, many negative effects were documented for the various aspects of the separation-individuation process of adolescence. Although there seems to be a great deal of information, there is still an incredible amount to learn about this process and how it is effected by the family structure. This study attempts to further assess the ways in which divorce may be an inhibitor to the adolescent separation-individuation process by examining levels of conflictual independence from the parents in college students.

CHAPTER III

The sample consisted of 94 undergraduate college students. The students' levels of conflictual independence from their parents were measured by Hoffman's Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI). All demographic data was obtained through the use of a demographic data sheet (DDS) designed by the researcher. The research involved a between subjects design.

Sample

The sample consisted of 94 undergraduate students from Rowan University in southern New Jersey. There was a total of 63 female subjects; 45 of them from intact homes and 18 from broken homes. Thirty-one males participated as well; 27 from intact homes and a mere 4 from broken homes. All subjects were between the ages of 18 and 24. The average age for females was 19 years and the average age for males was 21 years. The majority of females and males fell into the 18-21 age bracket (f= 53, m=22). A total of 18 were between the ages of 22 and 24 (f=9, m=9).

Of those in the divorced family group, 4 subjects were between the ages of 0-2 years when their parents separated or divorced, 13 were between the ages of 3-11, and 5 were in the age bracket of 12 and older. The average age of parental divorce for females was 7 years which fell into the childhood age bracket. On the contrary, 3 of the 4 male subjects from broken homes were in the infancy age bracket at the time of dissolution and the fourth was in late adolescence (22 years.).

Eighty of the 94 subjects fell into the caucasian group. The other 13

subjects were divided among the African American, Asian, and “other” groups. Six out of the 7 subjects who answered “other” were of a Hispanic origin. There were no Native American participants. All subjects spoke English as their native language.

All subjects were undergraduate. Participants included 35 freshman, 19 sophomores, 27 juniors, and 13 seniors. The majority of females came from the freshman category whereas males were more concentrated in the junior category. All students were single including seven who were engaged (f=6, m=1) and one who was divorced (female, age 21). Approximately 25% of subjects lived with their parents at the time of testing (f=47, m=25) and about 75% lived either on or off campus at school (f=16, m=6).

Measures

Each individual subject’s level of conflictual independence was measured by the conflictual independence subscale (CI) of Hoffman’s PSI. The entire inventory was administered to all students although only answers concerning the CI were scored. Other information was gathered through the use of a demographic data sheet (DDS). This included information such as gender, age, ethnicity, college year, marital status, residence [with or without parent(s)], marital status of biological parents, and age at the time of parental marital dissolution (if applicable). Participation occurred on a voluntary basis.

Design

This was a between subjects research design which involved a self-report inventory. Hoffman’s PSI is a 138 question inventory which asks questions about one’s relationships with the mother and father. Questions on conflictual independence were intermixed with questions from the other three subscales of the PSI. The entire inventory was administered although only the

answers to the CI questions were scored. There were 50 CI questions in total; 25 relating to the mother and 25 relating to the father. Each subject received a separate score for mother and father. Data regarding the independent variables was obtained from the DDS. This was information pertaining to gender and parental marital status.

This inventory was administered during regularly scheduled class hours in the beginning of the Spring 1999 semester (late January / early February) as well as at scheduled individual and group meetings which took place in the daytime and evening hours.

Testable Hypotheses

1 a.) No difference will be found in levels of conflictual independence for each parent between adolescents from divorced families and adolescents from intact families.

1 b.) Levels of conflictual independence from both parents for adolescents from intact families will be higher than those of adolescents from divorced families.

2 a.) No difference will be found in levels of conflictual independence for each parent between genders.

2 b.) Levels of conflictual independence for both parents will be different for males and females in both groups.

3 a.) There will be no interaction between gender and parental marital status for levels of conflictual independence.

3 b.) There will be an interaction between gender and parental marital status for levels of conflictual independence.

Analysis

The statistical test used to analyze the data in this study was a

multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). This test was applicable because the researcher wanted to compare 2 independent variables, each with two levels. These were type of family situation (intact or divorced) and parent group (mother or father). A regular ANOVA could not be used because there were two dependent variables as well: mother score and father score. The MANOVA was used to determine if there was a relationship between type of family situation and levels of adolescent conflictual independence. It was also used to highlight any existing relationship between gender group and levels of conflictual independence for each type of family situation.

Summary

This study included 94 undergraduate college students . The measurements used were Hoffman's PSI and a demographic data sheet. The design of the study was between subjects and a multivariate ANOVA was used to interpret the data.

CHAPTER IV

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine levels of conflictual independence during the separation-individuation process in late adolescents from both intact families and divorced families. The research was also used to determine whether the greatest amount of conflictual independence was achieved by males or females for each type of parental marital status group. Hoffman's PSI was used to determine levels of conflictual independence. Each subject received both a mother score and a father score.

Organization of the Data

Hoffman's Psychological Separation Inventory consists of 138 questions. The Conflictual Independence subscale of the PSI consists of 50 questions; 25 pertaining to the mother / child relationship and 25 pertaining to the father / child relationship. Each raw score was subtracted from the total possible points (125) to obtain the CI level for each parent. A mother score and a father score were determined for each subject.

A table was then made of the means and standard deviations for the mother and father scores according to the gender variable and the parental marital status (pms) variable (See Table 4.1). This was done in order to assess the variance of scores between the separate groups. For example, the female, divorced, father scores when compared to the male, divorced, father scores were 7.49 points higher. The standard deviation in the female group was also larger by 4.79 points. Mean scores for the male, married, pms group were 6-10

Table 4.1: Means According to Gender and PMS

gender	pms		father score	mother score
female	married	Mean	76.6000	75.0222
		N	45	45
		Std. Deviation	17.4596	16.0645
	divorced	Mean	75.3333	74.5000
		N	18	18
		Std. Deviation	23.9288	17.1129
	Total	Mean	76.2381	74.8730
		N	63	63
		Std. Deviation	19.3305	16.2327
male	married	Mean	86.8889	81.6296
		N	27	27
		Std. Deviation	9.8228	13.0034
	divorced	Mean	68.7500	80.7500
		N	4	4
		Std. Deviation	19.1377	12.6590
	Total	Mean	84.5484	81.5161
		N	31	31
		Std. Deviation	12.5879	12.7537
Total	married	Mean	80.4583	77.5000
		N	72	72
		Std. Deviation	15.7926	15.2389
	divorced	Mean	74.1364	75.6364
		N	22	22
		Std. Deviation	22.8604	16.3111
	Total	Mean	78.9787	77.0638
		N	94	94
		Std. Deviation	17.7667	15.4271

points higher than the mean scores for the female, married pms group, suggesting ,on some scale, a gender difference.

Two separate tables of means were also constructed. The first table displays the means for mother and father scores according to pms and the second table displays the means for mother and father scores according to gender (See Tables 4.2 and 4.3) It can be seen that mean scores of conflictual independence are approximately 2-6 points higher for the married group and scores for males are approximately 6-8 points higher than mean scores for females.

Analysis of the Data: MANOVA, Kendall's tau-c

A multivariate, between subjects analysis of variance or MANOVA was used to test the data (See Table 4.4). Results of this analysis showed no significance for the suggested relationships between parental marital status, gender, and levels of conflictual independence. Therefore, the three null hypotheses could not be rejected.

Two nonparametric tests were also performed to see if there were any significant correlations between any of the variables. First, both the mother and father scores were broken down into 4 percentiles for the purpose of simplifying the wide range of scores. Next, crosstabs were constructed to see how many males and females fell into each percentile for mother score and father score and a Kendall's tau-c was obtained for each score group. Crosstabs were also constructed to see how many subjects from both the divorced group and the married group fell into each percentile for mother and father scores. A Kendall's tau-c was obtained for each of these groups as well.

No correlation was found between gender and percentiles of mother scores, although the value (.206) was only slightly less than significant (.056).

Table 4.2: Parental Mean Scores According to PMS

pms		mother score	father score
married	Mean	77.5000	80.4583
	N	72	72
	Std. Deviation	15.2389	15.7926
	% of Total N	76.6%	76.6%
divorced	Mean	75.6364	74.1364
	N	22	22
	Std. Deviation	16.3111	22.8604
	% of Total N	23.4%	23.4%
Total	Mean	77.0638	78.9787
	N	94	94
	Std. Deviation	15.4271	17.7667
	% of Total N	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.3: Parental Mean Scores According to Gender

gender		mother score	father score
female	Mean	74.8730	76.2381
	N	63	63
	Std. Deviation	16.2327	19.3305
	% of Total N	67.0%	67.0%
male	Mean	81.5161	84.5484
	N	31	31
	Std. Deviation	12.7537	12.5879
	% of Total N	33.0%	33.0%
Total	Mean	77.0638	78.9787
	N	94	94
	Std. Deviation	15.4271	17.7667
	% of Total N	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.4: MANOVA

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	mother score	923.093 ^a	3	307.698	1.306	.278
	father score	2601.741 ^b	3	867.247	2.917	.038
Intercept	mother score	266663.42	1	266663.42	1131.500	.000
	father score	259311.49	1	259311.49	872.312	.000
GENDER	mother score	453.142	1	453.142	1.923	.169
	father score	37.639	1	37.639	.127	.723
PMS	mother score	5.387	1	5.387	.023	.880
	father score	1032.238	1	1032.238	3.472	.066
GENDER * PMS	mother score	.350	1	.350	.001	.969
	father score	780.319	1	780.319	2.625	.109
Error	mother score	21210.524	90	235.672		
	father score	26754.217	90	297.269		
Total	mother score	580384.00	94			
	father score	615694.00	94			
Corrected Total	mother score	22133.617	93			
	father score	29355.957	93			

a. R Squared = .042 (Adjusted R Squared = .010)

b. R Squared = .089 (Adjusted R Squared = .058)

However, gender and percentiles of father scores were found to be significantly correlated with a value of .240 and a significance of .017. There were no significant correlations found between pms and percentiles of mother scores nor between pms and percentiles of father scores.

Two graphs were constructed to highlight the major differences between mother scores and father scores according to gender (See Figures 4.1, 4.2). For example, the percentage of females in the first percentile of father scores was much higher than the percentage of males in the first percentile of father scores (23.62%). On the other hand, there was less of a difference between genders in the first percentile of mother scores (10.81%). In addition, percentage of female scores decreased from the first to the second percentile for father scores (11.1%), whereas, it stayed the same for mother scores (30.16%). Finally, percentage of male scores increased dramatically from the first to the second percentile for father scores (9.68% to 25.81%), whereas, it decreased slightly from the first to the second percentile for mother scores (19.35% to 16.13%).

Figure 4.1: Percentiles of Mother Score According to Gender

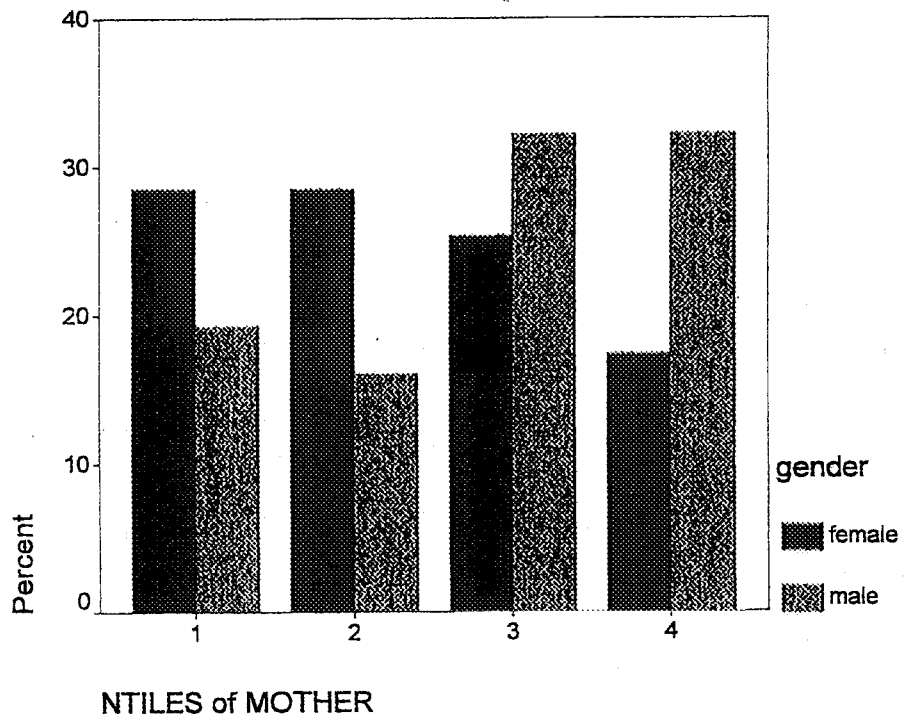
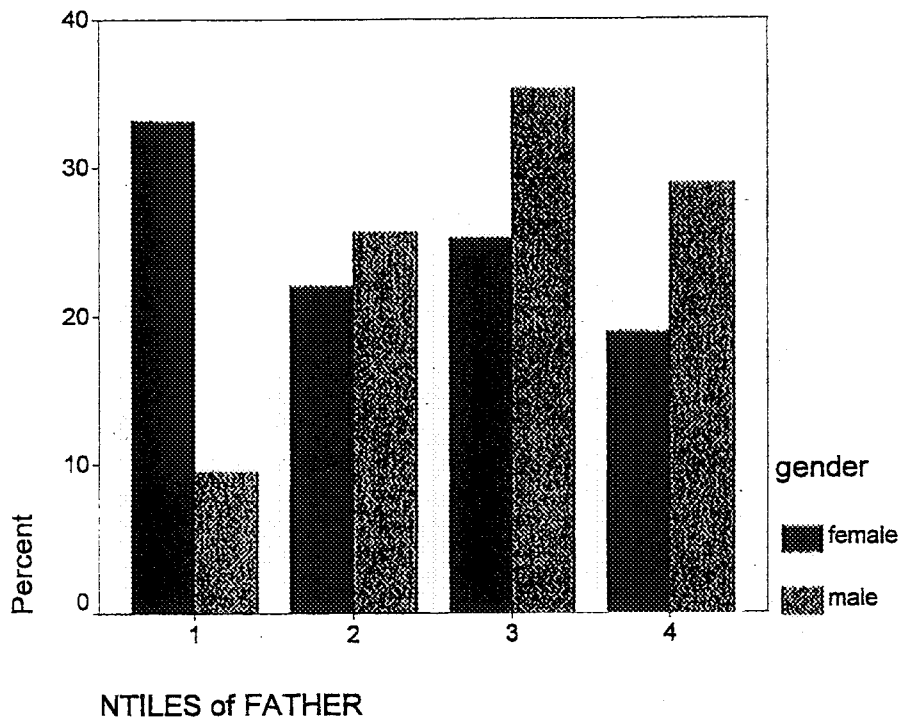


Figure 4.2: Percentiles of Father Score According to Gender



CHAPTER V

Introduction

Psychological separation from the parents is an aspect of maturation that can have varying levels of difficulty. One factor that may complicate the separation-individuation process of late adolescence is parental divorce. According to Hoffman (1984), an individual's drive toward healthy personal adjustment is critically dependent on his or her ability to psychologically separate from the parents.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of divorce on late adolescents during the separation-individuation process. Specifically, the research concentrated on adolescent levels of conflictual independence in relation to the mother and father.

Summary of the Problem

Does parental divorce have negative effects on college students' levels of conflictual independence in relation to the mother and father?

Summary of the Hypotheses

Levels of conflictual independence will be lower for college students whose parents are divorced when compared to college students whose parents are married. There will be a difference in levels of conflictual independence according to gender for both parental marital status groups. Finally, there will be an interaction between gender and parental marital status for levels of conflictual independence.

Summary of the Procedure

The sample consisted of 94 undergraduate students from Rowan University in southern New Jersey. There was a total of 63 female subjects; 45 from intact homes and 18 from broken homes. Thirty-one males participated as well; 27 from intact homes and 4 from broken homes. All subjects were between the ages of 18 and 24.

This was a between subjects research design which involved a self-report inventory. Each individual subject's levels of conflictual independence were measured by the conflictual independence subscale (CI) of Hoffman's PSI, a 138 question inventory which asks questions about one's relationships with the mother and father. The entire inventory was administered to all students although only answers concerning the CI were scored. There were 50 CI questions in total; 25 relating to the mother and 25 relating to the father. Each subject received a separate score for mother and father. Other information was gathered through the use of a demographic data sheet.

This inventory was administered during regularly scheduled class hours in the beginning of the Spring 1999 semester (late January / early February) as well as at scheduled individual and group meetings which took place in the daytime and evening hours. Participation occurred on a voluntary basis.

The statistical test used to analyze the data in this study was a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) as well as two nonparametric tests.

Summary of the Findings

Results of the MANOVA showed no significance for the suggested relationships between parental marital status, gender, and levels of conflictual independence. Therefore, the three null hypotheses could not be rejected.

The researcher then performed two nonparametric tests to see if there were any significant correlations between any of the variables. No correlation

was found between gender and percentiles of mother scores. However, gender and percentiles of father scores were found to be significantly correlated. There were no significant correlations found between pms and percentiles of mother scores nor between pms and percentiles of father scores. These results show a possible link between gender and levels of conflictual independence as related to the father.

Conclusions

The results according to the MANOVA were not significant. There are various reasons why this may have occurred. One major reason may be because of the small sample size that was used. Another reason may be that subjects were only taken from one university, and there is no way of knowing whether this sample of students taken from Rowan University is representative of all colleges and universities in the area.

Due to the fact that the majority of the subjects were undergraduate psychology students, majority of them were also female. In fact, females outnumbered males in this study 2 to 1. In addition, only 4 males came from divorced families as compared to the 18 females from broken homes. It is most likely safe to say that these 4 males did not represent the majority. Standard deviations for female scores for the divorced and intact pms groups were a great deal larger than those for males most likely due to the small size of the male subject group.

From the results of the Kendall's tau-c and Figure 4.2, one can see that scores of conflictual independence for males start out particularly low, steadily rise, and then decrease slightly in the fourth percentile. The opposite is true for the female scores. These seem to start out very high in the first percentile and mostly decrease, except for a slight rise from the second to the third percentile. This may point to a possible difference in patterns of separation between males

and females. Even though gender was found to be significantly correlated with percentiles of father score, there is still speculation due to the 2 to 1 ratio of females to males. If the sample size had been larger, perhaps a larger difference between males and females would have been shown, or perhaps no difference would have been shown at all.

In addition, it was not taken into account whether or not place of residence would have an effect on scores. Because of this, it is unknown whether or not living at school allows for greater conflictual independence in this particular study.

It is also not known if the age of the child at the time of parental marital dissolution may have affected the results. This age ranged from less than a year old to 22 years old for this particular sample. There is evidence from other research that suggests different effects of divorce on different age groups, as well as long-lasting effects. This wide age range may have effected these results.

Testing conditions may have effected individual scores. For example, some students signed up for the experiment as part of their psychology requirement and took the inventory in a large quiet room under no pressure or distractions. Other students were approached in the evening hours on campus and asked if they would like to participate. If they agreed, the inventory was taken in their room or apartment which may not have been as quiet. Still, other students were given the inventory as part of their class requirement in the presence of their undergraduate professor. Students may have taken the inventory more seriously if they believed it to have some bearing on their class grade.

Type of mood at the time of administration may also have affected scores. For instance, if the subject was in an exceptionally bad or good mood their scores may have been skewed. Temporary discord with one or both of the

parents may have also skewed the results.

Finally, type of measure could have been a strong influence on the results. Hoffman's PSI is a self-report inventory. Some of the questions may have been interpreted differently by different subjects or, in fact, misinterpreted. In addition, many subjects commented on how long the inventory was. Although the researcher only scored the CI questions, the entire inventory of 138 questions was administered so as not to skew the scores in any way. This may have allowed for a negative effect in that subjects may have gotten tired and rushed through the latter half of the inventory, not giving each question enough thought or perhaps misreading questions.

Implications for Future Research

Although the results of the aforementioned hypotheses were insignificant in this study, it does not mean that this topic should not be further addressed. There is very little literature dealing with the effects of divorce on the separation-individuation process of late adolescence. McCurdy and Sherman (1996) found a relationship between pms and father score in that college students from intact families had higher levels of conflictual independence from their fathers. The fact that the present study did not reveal such findings should, in itself, prompt future research.

For future research, the researcher recommends using a larger sample of subjects as well as using a larger geographic region. For example, one should use subjects from a variety of colleges or universities in the area in order to have a more representative sample.

In addition, minimizing the number of questions on the inventory might rule out any tiring effects that may have taken place in this study. Subjects should all be tested in the same setting or a similar setting that is free of pressures and distractions in order to rule out environmental factors. This

includes having the same proctor, as well, for all testing sessions.

Research should also consider any possible mediating factors of the negative effects of divorce, such as whether the subject lives at home or at school and what age the child was at the time of parental marital dissolution. It might also be beneficial to explore the social surroundings and sources of support for those students who have higher levels of conflictual independence in order to see if a similar social environment might help those students with lower levels. In addition, it might be interesting to study levels of conflictual independence longitudinally over the course of college to observe what aspects provide for healthy separation-individuation.

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APPENDIX A:
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

Researcher: Jill Fredricks

Subject# _____

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

Instructions: Please circle the answer that applies to you, or fill in the appropriate answer.

1.) What is your gender? male female

2.) What is your age? _____

3.) What is your race?

caucasian African American Asian Native American other

4.) What is your current college status?

freshman sophomore junior senior other

5.) What is your current marital status?

single engaged married divorced widowed

6.) As a student, where is your place of residence?

with parents (at home) on/off campus (with friends or alone)

7.) What is the current marital status of your biological parents?

married separated divorced other _____

*(Please continue to question #8 if you said your parents were separated or divorced.)

8.) How old were you when your parents got divorced/separated? _____