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EXPLORING JOINT CUSTODY: INTERVIEWS WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS
ABOUT THEIR CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

by

Marissa D. Zink

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(Child Development and Family Relations)

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University of Maine

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study provides a greater understanding of the impacts of joint custody on college students. Researchers in this field of study have yet to examine the experiences of children in joint custody arrangements in depth to this date. Interviews were conducted with ten college students who grew up in joint custody arrangements. The college men and women were asked to reflect back on their experiences of their joint custody arrangements. Findings provide a greater awareness of how college students describe their experiences growing up, including residing the majority of weekdays with their mothers and long weekends with their fathers. Parents' homes also remained relatively close. The benefits of joint custody reported by participants included that they enjoyed having two homes and would not have wanted another custody arrangement.

Meanwhile, findings show college students' challenges with joint custody included, packing/forgetting belongings as well as adjusting to their father's new home(s). College students described their parent's new relationships as impacting factors on their relationships with their parents, but they added time helped heal their connection. Suggestions and recommendations to children and parents with joint custody were given by participants, such as; for children to communicate with parents and for parents to keep the peace with each other. Suggestions and recommendations were also given to lawyers and judges involved in joint custody arrangements, which included that each parent should be given equal opportunity to obtain custody and/or residential custody. Ideas for future research are provided as well.

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CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Divorce is a common occurrence for many families in the United States. According to the National Center for Health Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S has one of the highest divorce rates in the world (CDC, 2016). Divorce impacts approximately 40-50% of current marriages throughout the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012). Even more fragile are second marriages, in which around 60% end in divorce (Coontz, 1992). Most of these divorces (65%) involve minor children. It is estimated that more than one million children under the age of 18 experience parental divorce every year (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012). While divorce has rescued families from domestic violence and destructive marriages, economic and psychological issues can arise throughout the aftermath of divorce (Coontz, 1997). The divorcing parents must decide how their child or children will be cared for now that their family situation has been altered.

Since the emergence of joint custody in the 1970's, many families and judges have decided that joint or shared parenting (vs. sole parenting) are in the best interests of children (Melli & Brown, 2008). Although joint custody has gained prominence within post-divorce custody arrangements, there have been no national surveys on the exact number of children that are in joint custody arrangements. The latest statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau's *America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2017*, only reported

children's living arrangements that included living with both parents, living with mother only, living with father only, or living with neither parent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2017). The U.S. Census Bureau does not distinguish children living with both parents between children living with both parents in the same household, or living with both parents in different households as part of joint custody. A 2010 study on the growth of joint custody estimated the incidence of joint custody to be 50.3% or half of all cases (Meyer, Cancian & Cook, 2017). This study concluded that joint parental custody has officially replaced sole maternal custody as the most common form of custody arrangement in the United States by accounting for over half of the thousands of cases examined by these researchers.

Types of Custody

There are several child custody options that can occur when parents divorce. Legal custody and residential custody must be decided either through a parental agreement or through a court order. These custody decisions can result in several different types of arrangements.

- *Sole Legal Custody* awards the primary care, sole decision-making, and authority over the child to one parent (Frankel, 1985). This means that a child or children live exclusively with one parent. This parent is most often the mother. The non-custodial parent may be granted visitation rights and there may be a schedule in which the other parent may see the children (Lakin, 1994). Overnight visits with the non-custodial parent may be allowed (Meyer, Cancian & Cook, 2017).

- *Joint Legal Custody* is a custody arrangement that gives the authority to both parents to make educational, religious, and medical decisions for their children (Gunnoe & Braver, 2001). This does not mean that each child will physically spend time or reside with each parent equally; it simply means the decision-making concerning the child or children is shared between parents.

In joint legal custody, the question of which parent the child will physically live with ('residency') is also determined. Residential custody arrangements vary widely from children having only one primary residence (often with the mother) to a combination of shared time spent living with each parent:

- *Residential custody* refers to the child or children living with one parent who has primary residential custody, with some visitation with the other parent, or
- *Shared residential custody* is a common arrangement in joint legal custody, in which a child or children will spend some time physically residing with each parent (Gunnoe & Braver, 2001). This arrangement may also be known as "joint physical custody", "dual residence", or "shared care" (Smyth, McIntosh, Emery & Howarth, 2015). These shared living arrangements vary and can range from 35% to 50% of time spent residing with each parent (Nielson, 2011). For instance, some parents may have a weekday/weekend schedule, while others may switch off each week or mid-week to mid-week. In other joint residential arrangements, children may also switch residences as often as every single day or as infrequently as every other month (Prazen, Wolfinger, Cahill & Kowaleski-Jones, 2011).

Joint Custody History

Joint custody presented itself as a custody alternative in the early 1970's and has since gained immense popularity among American policymakers (Donnelly & Finkelhor, 1992). There have been many changes, both socially and legally, which have contributed to the shifts in custody arrangements over time. However, historically, children were seen as "property" and sole custody was often granted to fathers as they had the rights and responsibilities to support, protect, and educate their children (Wilkinson, 1992).

In nineteenth century America, more research on child development began to surface and legislators began to consider that the "best interests of the child" should be taken into consideration during custody decisions (Mason, 2012). By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the custody preference for fathers was replaced by the *tender years presumption* which held that mothers were the best parent to take care of children during the "tender" or early years of their lives (Derevenesky & Deschamps, 1997).

Many researchers argued that the industrial revolution developed the "modern" family that solidified men as the money makers and women as responsible for taking care of the children and home (Mason, 2012). This *tender years presumption* stood strong throughout the twentieth century and by the 1960's in almost every state, it was decided that sole maternal custody should be awarded in divorce decisions (Lambert, 1997).

As a surge of research developed in the middle to late twentieth century, researchers began to highlight the benefits of having both parental figures in the lives of children. By the 1970's all 50 state had enacted legislation in favor of the "best interests of the child" which was intended to seek gender-neutral decisions (Jellum, 2004).

The 21st century has seen the acknowledgement of other family configurations beyond a married mother and father, which has challenged the application of the “best interests” of the child rule. In more recent years, parents of children born out-of-wedlock, unwed fathers, gay and lesbian parents, and non-biological parents are all petitioning to obtain custody rights of their children (Mason, 2012).

In the United States, custody laws are not federal laws and are left to the states to decide independently. According to the American Bar Association (2014), 15 states have passed legislation that presumes or favors joint custody, which has encouraged more states to take a look into their existing custody legislation. Currently, no national data exists on the prevalence of shared time parenting; however, some researchers have made estimates. For example, a study examining the growth in shared parenting observed a rise in the incidence of joint custody in 12,279 cases they examined (Meyer, Cancian & Cook, 2017). These researchers estimated joint custody occurred in 11.6% or 1 of every 10 cases in 1989. Two decades later, in 2010, the incidence of joint custody was estimated to be 50.3% or half of all cases, indicating joint custody has officially replaced sole maternal custody as the most common form of post-divorce custody arrangement (Meyer, Cancian & Cook, 2017).

Research on Joint Custody

There has been a myriad of research studies on children of divorce; however, joint custody studies are more sparse. Over two decades ago, the American Psychological Association published a report to the U.S. Commission on Child and Family Welfare that summarized and evaluated research regarding joint custody (Fournier & Perry, 1995).

The report stated that joint custody was associated with positive outcomes for children, including adjustment, decreased parent conflict, and increased parental involvement (especially father involvement). Many of these research studies obtained their information from the parents' perspectives. While their perspective is an important piece of understanding how children have dealt with joint custody arrangements, responses of parents may not accurately reflect how their children truly felt about the experiences they had within their custody arrangement (Bing, Nelson & Wesolowski, 2009).

Research on the impacts of joint custody on children continue to be limited (Kelly, 1993). There have only been a handful of studies examining joint residential custody as studies commonly categorize children as either having joint or sole custody, without deciphering how much time children lived with each parent (Nielson, 2011). Those studies that have investigated both joint and sole custody arrangements usually have grouped joint legal custody children and joint residential custody children. Therefore, it is unknown which of these children actually lived with both parents from 35% to 50% of the time. With this in mind, there are even fewer studies in which researchers focus exclusively on joint custody arrangements which have asked children how they felt about living in two homes (Nielson, 2013).

Research on joint custody has focused primarily on three main areas: (1) adjustment issues for children after divorce, (2) the impact of the parents' relationship with each other, and (3) the parent-child relationship post-divorce. The research in these areas will be discussed below.

Adjustment After Divorce

Residential Adjustment. The residential aspect of joint custody has been a common focus of research in this area to see how adjusting to living in two homes may impact children. In a study by Steinman (1981), 24 families with 32 children were interviewed from the San Francisco Bay Area. In the sample of children, there were 17 girls and 15 boys, who were ages 4 ½ to 15 years old. The criteria were that the children had to have lived in a joint custody arrangement for two to nine years. This study highlighted that the children's experiences of joint custody were mixed. Specifically, while she found that the children enjoyed having access to both parents, one-third of the children felt overburdened by the demands of maintaining a strong presence in two different homes. The author concluded, however, that it was not clear if joint custody was the primary factor in the children's feelings of burden, but the researcher could conclude this arrangement did add some burden to their lives.

In a study by Sopp (2003) of adult children of divorce in Southern California, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 individuals who had lived in joint custody arrangements as children. The majority of the sample stated that they lived with their mothers primarily and visited their fathers every weekend. The researcher investigated the likes and dislikes of residing in two homes. While respondents talked about enjoying their time spent with each parent after the divorce, they also found challenges such as financial difficulties while living with their mother, and adjusting to new families as their parents remarried.

Melli & Brown (2008) compared a sample of 590 divorced mothers and fathers in Wisconsin who had shared physical custody of their children to 590 parents with sole

maternal custody. One of the most undesirable effects of divorce this study highlighted was the number of post-divorce residential moves. Only a quarter (26%) of sole mother custody families lived in the pre-divorce home, whereas many more of the children (60%) in shared custody reported they retained their old neighborhood for a substantial amount of time with one of their parents.

Social and Emotional Adjustment. The impact of divorce on children's social and behavioral adjustment is another area of research where researchers have compared sole vs. joint custody arrangements. Kline, Tschann, Johnston & Wallerstein (1989) examined 93 children of divorce, ages three to fourteen, and followed up with them one and two years after their parent's divorce. One quarter (25%) of these children were in a joint custody arrangement. To examine emotional adjustment, researchers asked children about their self-esteem, coping with daily living, and symptoms of anger and depression. For social adjustment, children were asked about their closeness to friends, involvement in organized clubs/activities, and enjoyment of time spent with peers. The study found that children in joint custody arrangements did not show better social or emotional adjustment after divorce than sole custody children. From these results, it was concluded that custody arrangements have little effect on children's social and emotional adjustment.

Similar conclusions were found in a study by Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornbusch (1996), who surveyed 522 adolescents of divorce on their social and behavioral adjustment. The researchers looked at school adjustment, depression/anxiety, and deviance and found mixed results. As for school adjustment, students in joint custody arrangements reported higher grades. However, the study found that levels of

depression/anxiety did not depend on the adolescent's custody arrangement. They also found that children in joint custody did not differ from children in sole maternal custody on deviance scores.

Gunnoe and Braver (2001) investigated a sample of 340 families to compare children in joint custody and sole maternal custody arrangements. They asked parents about their child's behavior problems, antisocial behaviors, impulsive behaviors, and depressive behaviors. As in previous studies above, the child's custody arrangement did not correlate with any adverse behavioral issues.

A more recent study by Hough (2006) compared the psychological adjustment of one hundred college students who had been raised in joint custody vs. sole custody arrangements. The psychological factors participants were questioned on were depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms, low self-esteem, and family problems. Consistent with the previous studies examined, there were no significant differences in the responses of joint custody participants and sole custody participants on depression, anxiety and family issues. The only significant difference reported was for those in joint custody arrangements who had more siblings. Those with more siblings reported lower self-esteem scores; those in joint custody arrangements with fewer siblings reported higher self-esteem. The researcher said one explanation for this finding could be that with fewer siblings there are less siblings to compete with and the child will get more attention from parents the fewer siblings they have.

Inter-parental Conflict after Divorce

Another prevalent subject in the research on joint custody is the conflict which

may arise between parents who must co-parent. An early study by Wilkinson (1992) of 40 boys and girls between ages 8-12 in a large southwestern metropolitan area compared participants in joint and sole physical custody to find out if their parent's conflict was detrimental to their adjustment. The researcher found no significant differences in children's adjustment between sole and joint custody arrangements regarding their parent's conflict levels after divorcing.

In the study by Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornbusch (1996) of 522 adolescents with divorced parents, they asked about inter-parental conflict. While most of the adolescents in joint custody arrangements reported higher cooperation among their parents, the levels of hostility between parents was not significantly different for mother residence compared to joint residence custody.

Duran-Aydintug (1997) interviewed 60 college students of divorce at a large Southern university on the quality of their parents' relationships. They found the amount of conflict between their parents were major factors that impacted college students' attitudes and behaviors. Although this study did not look at those students in sole vs. joint custody arrangements, it offers some clues to the importance of inter-parental conflict and is important because it took into account the views of college students.

In contrast, Gunnoe & Braver's (2001) research of 340 divorced families found no evidence that outcomes for children in joint custody arrangements were moderated by the amount of parental conflict. Unlike the previous study, this study obtained these conclusions from parents rather than their children's perspectives. However, Lee's (2002) study of 59 children of joint residential custody and sole maternal custody found that inter-parental aggression is a factor which can suppress the positive impacts that the

study found in children of joint residential custody. Lee concluded that for children to benefit from joint residential custody, parents need to provide a low conflict environment.

Sopp's (2003) interviews with 15 adult children on their views of their custody arrangement asked how participants perceived their parent's relationship after their divorce. Forty percent classified their parent's post-divorce relationship as friendly and civilized; 33% said their parent's relationship was bad initially, but better later; and 27% reported their parent's post-divorce relationship as bad. Participants talked about the importance of their parents maintaining a good relationship with each other after divorce in order for joint custody to work smoothly.

Parent-Child Relationships after Divorce

The relationship between parents and their children following divorce is another common topic among researchers investigating the impact of divorce on children. In a past study of 43 elementary aged children in sole and joint custody by Ilfeld (1989), the researcher examined children's relationships with their father after divorce. When comparing those in sole maternal custody arrangements to children in joint custody arrangements, the researcher found one significant difference that children in joint custody reported spending more time doing child centered activities. Therefore, children of joint custody claimed that time spent with their fathers more commonly involved activities fun and enjoyable to the child. With regard to emotional closeness to fathers, no differences were found in children's custody arrangements. The study concluded that there was no statistically significant information relating custody arrangement to better or worse outcomes in the father-child relationship.

Donnelly and Finkelhor (1992) conducted interviews on the relationship between 160 children over the age of five and their parents. Sole custody families, joint custody families, and intact families were all part of the sample. The study focused on how both children and parents felt about their disagreements, support, and affection between one another. The researchers concluded that children from joint custody arrangements showed less support and affection toward their parents than those in sole custody households. However, their custody arrangement (sole vs. joint) did not impact the children's level of disagreement with parents.

Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornbusch's study (1996) involving interviews with 522 adolescents of divorce examined parent-child relationships. The study found that those children in joint custody arrangements appeared to have better relationships and attributed it to feeling more engaged in both households since they occupied both frequently. Even though these children spent less time with their mothers and fathers than if in a sole custody arrangement, it did not impair their ability to remain close with both their parents.

Sopp's research (2003) involving interviews with 15 adult children of joint custody examined their relationships with both parents. Many reported having a good relationship with their mother in both the past and present; most gave reasons for how joint custody impacted their relationship with their mother in a positive way. On the other hand, over half (53%) of the participants characterized their relationship with their fathers as bad or difficult and most of participants stated that the joint custody arrangement impacted their relationship with their father negatively. Most reported that they now have a stronger relationship with their father as an adult as compared to when they were

younger and living in a joint custody arrangement.

Conclusion

Joint custody has become the preferred post-divorce arrangement in more recent years. While research has found that children can be negatively impacted by their parents' divorce, some research has suggested that these negative aspects can be minimized by joint custody arrangements that serve to maintain ongoing relationships with both parents. However, as this literature review suggests, most studies on joint custody have been based on the parents' perspectives; few studies have focused on the children's perspectives of being raised in a joint custody arrangement. In the small number of studies that have investigated the experiences of children in joint custody situations, many were published several decades ago.

Two decades ago, the American Psychological Association published a report stating that joint custody was associated with positive outcomes for children, including adjustment, decreased parent conflict, and increased father involvement (Fournier & Perry, 1999). However, other studies on joint custody have yielded conflicting conclusions concerning children's perspectives of their adjustment, their parental conflict, and their parent-child relationship. These inconsistencies do not provide clear guidance for parents, lawyers, or judges to understand how joint custody may impact children specifically. The gaps in this field of research, at the same time that joint custody has gained in popularity, make the importance of this study timely. Questions still remain in terms of how adults who were raised by divorced parents in joint custody arrangements describe their childhood experiences.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This study used an exploratory, qualitative methodology to investigate the experiences of college students raised by divorced parents who were in joint custody arrangements. Although this custody arrangement is typical, few studies have examined how the children involved have experienced this arrangement. Much of the research has been conducted from the parents' perspective on joint custody arrangements, without the children's perspective.

In order to understand the experiences of those growing up in a joint custody arrangement in which time was spent living with both parents, the following overarching research question was developed: *How do college students who were raised by divorced parents in joint custody arrangements describe their experiences?* Four sub-questions investigated in this study were:

1. *How do college students raised by divorced parents describe their experience in their joint custody arrangement?*
2. *How do college students raised by divorced parents describe the benefits and challenges experienced in their joint custody arrangement?*
3. *How do college students raised by divorced parents describe the impact the joint custody arrangement had on their relationship with each of their parents?*

4. *What suggestions/recommendations do college students who were raised by divorced parents have for others (children, parents, lawyers and judges) in order for the joint custody arrangement to be successful?*

The Sample

The criteria for participants in the study included college students' ages 19-21 who were raised by divorced parents in a joint custody arrangement that included time residing with each parent. For the purpose of this study, joint physical custody was defined as at least one-third of their time spent residing with each parent. Their parents' divorce needed to have happened while they were in elementary school (or before) in order to have significant experience growing up in a divorced family (5 or more years). Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. Participants were identified through friends and acquaintances of the researcher, word-of-mouth, announcements made in classes, and e-mail announcements sent to several university discussion boards and conferences. See Appendix A.

The final sample included 10 participants, five females and five males. See Table 1. Pseudonyms were assigned in an effort to best protect the identities of the participants. The overall age span of the participants ranged from 19 to 21 years old, with the average being 20.4 years old. Nine of the participants were Caucasian and one participant was African American. The age the participants were at the time of their parents' divorce ranged from 2 to 14 years old, with the average age at the time of their parents' divorce being 6.5 years old. Nine of the participants had siblings at the time of their parents' divorce and one participant had no siblings at the time of their parents' divorce. Of those

participants who had siblings, they ranged from having 1-3 siblings at the time of their parents' divorce.

Table 1 Demographics of the Participants

Participant	Age	Gender Identification	Ethnicity	Age at Parents' Divorce	Number of Siblings at Time of Parents' Divorce
Anne	21	Female	Caucasian	2 years old	1
Grace	20	Female	Caucasian	4 years old	3
Margaret	20	Female	Caucasian	5 years old	1
Miranda	21	Female	Caucasian	10 years old	2
Penelope	20	Female	Caucasian	6 years old	2
Alan	21	Male	Caucasian	14 years old	1
David	20	Male	Caucasian	4 years old	1
Mark	21	Male	Caucasian	7 years old	1
Nicholas	19	Male	Caucasian	2 years old	0
Trevor	21	Male	African American	11 years old	2

Interview Procedure

The interviews were comprised of a series of general questions which focused on the experience of being raised by divorced parents in a joint custody arrangement and was approved through the Human Subjects Committee of the university. See Appendix B and Appendix D. Interviews began with basic demographic questions (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, age when parents' divorced, number of siblings). College students were then asked a series of questions in order for them to describe their own joint custody arrangement, the benefits and challenges, and impact on their relationship with each parent while growing up in a joint custody arrangement. Finally, college students were asked to provide any suggestions or recommendations for how others (i.e., children, parents, lawyers, judges) might ensure that this type of custody arrangement is successful.

Interview Technique

College students who met the criteria and expressed interest in participating in the study were given a copy of the consent form before an interview was scheduled. See Appendix C. Consent was implied when they agreed to arrange an interview after reviewing the consent form. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private space or conference room on the university campus (i.e. Memorial Union). Participants were assured that any and all responses would be kept confidential. No names or identifying information was included in the data report and a pseudonym was assigned to each student. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, it was understood some students may not have been willing to be recorded. All

participants were given the option to have the interviews recorded or to have extensive notes taken. All interviews were taped since all participants agreed prior to the beginning of the interview. QuickTime player was used to record the interviews. At the end of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to review their responses for omissions or clarifications. I transcribed all of the interviews and the content from the taped interviews were then deleted.

Interview Analysis

This was an exploratory study and involved interviews with a small number of ten college students who were raised by divorced parents in a joint custody arrangement in order to allow an in-depth examination of their experiences. Interviews were analyzed using established methods of qualitative inquiry, including coding and categorizing processes that make use of both deductive and inductive approaches (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interviews were coded for common topics and themes were created. I began with a coding list in which I came up with words that would stand for a coding category. This made the process of systematically reading transcriptions easier by coding responses as I went. For example, some of my codes were; “benefit”, “challenge”, and “communication”. When I read through the interviews I would place these codes next to responses. For example, when I came across a response which encompassed a challenge in the college student’s joint custody arrangement I wrote “challenge” next to it. A specific topic or code was considered a theme if the majority (over 50%) of students’ responses included it. For instance, if six or more college students mentioned packing

was a challenge in their responses; this would have been coded as a “challenge”, categorized specifically as a “packing challenge”, and then considered a theme.

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

This chapter will provide a comprehensive portrait to answer the overarching research question: *How do college students who were raised by divorced parents in joint custody arrangements describe their experiences?* The four sub-questions that will be answered are:

1. *How do college students raised by divorced parents describe their experience in their joint custody arrangement?*
2. *How do college students raised by divorced parents describe the benefits and challenges experienced in their joint custody arrangement?*
3. *How do college students raised by divorced parents describe the impact the joint custody arrangement had on their relationship with each of their parents?*
4. *What suggestions/recommendations do college students who were raised by divorced parents have for others (children, parents, lawyers and judges) in order for the joint custody arrangement to be successful?*

Within this chapter, each of the four sub-questions will be answered in the following sections: description of their experience, benefits and challenges, the impact on relationship with parents, and suggestions and recommendations. Themes that emerged from the interviews in each of these areas will be discussed and direct quotations from the interview transcriptions are included throughout the chapter. See Table 2. Each section will conclude with a summary that highlights the main findings to answer that

research question. Finally, a chapter summary will highlight the main findings to answer the overarching research question.

Table 2 Themes for the Four Sub-Research Questions

Sub-Research Question #1: Description of their Experience

- I mostly lived with my mom
- My parents lived pretty close to each other
- When I got my license it changed

Sub-Research Question #2: Benefits and Challenges

- Benefits:
 - I liked having two homes
 - I got to have fun with my Dad
 - I'm glad it was joint custody
- Challenges:
 - Packing/Forgetting Belongings
 - I didn't get a say in my own schedule (especially early on)
 - Adjusting to Dad's new home

Sub-Research Question #3: Impact on Relationship with Parents

- I felt like I had to choose sides
- My parent's new relationship added tension
- Time heals

Sub-Research Question #4: Suggestions and Recommendations

- For other kids in joint custody:
 - It's not your fault
 - Communicate with your parents
- For the parents:
 - Keep the peace
 - It's all about the child
- For the lawyers/judges:
 - Ask the child for input
 - Focus on both parents' sides

Description of Their Experience

In this section, I describe the experiences of participants as they pertain to factors influencing their experiences while growing up in a joint custody arrangement. I will answer the first sub research question: *How do college students raised by divorced parents describe their experience in their joint custody arrangement?* There were three unique themes that emerged between the male and female participant samples of transcriptions from the in-depth interviews as they relate to describing factors influencing their experiences growing up in joint custody. See Table 2. First, although this was shared custody, the majority of the participants lived primarily with their mothers, while only one participant lived primarily with their father and another participant had equal time living with each parent. Second, the participants reported throughout their joint custody arrangement that their parents lived within driving distance. The third theme to emerge was that the majority of college students reported that changes occurred to their joint custody arrangement after obtaining their driver's license.

I mostly lived with my mom

The first theme to emerge within college students' descriptions of their experiences was that they lived primarily with their mothers. Although college students identified and participated in the study because their parents shared joint custody that including residing with each parent, eight of the ten participants described spending more than half of their time living with their mother. In most cases, mothers were awarded residential custody of their children. One female participant described how her joint custody arrangement worked on a regular week:

It started with I would be at my mom's house primarily four out of the seven days and I think it was I would stay with her Monday until Friday, and then my dad would pick me up. I would stay with him until Monday and then I'd go to my mom's at night. So that was kind of how it started. (Anne).

She explains how she would spend the weekdays with her mother and every weekend with her father. Anne's mother had residential custody in the joint custody arrangement.

A male college student discussed how his time was shared between parents in his joint custody arrangement:

I was primarily with my mom during the week and with my dad on the weekend... She lived in the house that we grew up in, so all my things were there. I was with my dad on the weekends, so I definitely spent less time at my dad's. (Trevor).

Trevor explained that, like many college students, his joint custody arrangement consisted of him spending weekdays with his mother and weekends with his father. He stressed that his mother remained in the home he grew up in and that he spent less time with his father than with his mother.

My parents lived pretty close to each other

A second theme that surfaced from the interviews was that their parents lived fairly close during their joint custody arrangements. Collectively, the participants experienced having their parents' homes near one another while growing up. Their commutes from their parent's houses ranged from being within walking distance from each other to being a 30-minute drive as the longest commute. One female participant

described how far her father lived from her mother's home throughout her joint custody arrangement:

He first lived in an apartment complex in the same town that my mom was living in. Then he ended up buying a house literally three miles from where my mom lived. So, proximity wise, my parents lived pretty close to each other, which made things easier. (Penelope).

Penelope explains that although her father moved a couple of times, he stayed in the area of her mother's home. She added that her parents living close to each other made things easier on her joint custody arrangement.

Another female college student described how far her parents lived from each other during her joint custody arrangement:

Oh yeah. Well first my dad, when they first got separated or whatever he lived on the opposite side of town, but then he moved to the town over from us, which is ... and his house now is only like five minutes away from my house, so. (Miranda).

Miranda describes that right after her parents' divorce that her father lived across town from her mother's house. As time went on, Miranda's father moved even closer to her mother's home making the commute a short five-minute drive.

When I got my license it changed

The third theme which was discussed by the majority of college students was when they got their driver's license, changes were able to occur in their joint custody arrangements. Only one participant stated that their arrangement stayed exactly the same throughout their childhood. The majority of college students cited once they (and in some

cases their sibling, too) got their license this made their arrangements more fluid, enabling them to go back and forth from homes easier. One male college student described the impact getting their license had on his joint custody arrangement:

Yeah. I'd say probably when I got my license it changed a little because then I started being on my own schedule. Like if I wanted to hang out with friends and I was supposed to go to my mom's that night or something, I could just push it to another night. (Mark)

Mark explains how getting his license enabled him to create his own joint custody schedule that worked out how he wanted it to.

A female participant also described the impact that getting her license had on her joint custody arrangement:

Yeah, when my brother and I got to high school and he and I, we shared a car and everything... We were more in charge of the situation if that makes sense. We could go to our dad's a little bit more often if we wanted to or stay with our mom because we weren't relying on our parents for pickups and drop-offs anymore. (Grace).

Grace also described how her obtaining her driver's license, as well as her brother getting his license, allowed them to take charge of how they wanted their joint custody arrangement to work. She stated that not relying on her parents for transportation made the siblings free to make more decisions on when, where, and what house they wanted to be at.

Describing Their Experience Summary

Across all the interviews, three common themes emerged in their description of their joint custody arrangement. When college students described their living

arrangements, the majority of the participants described joint custody arrangements in which they lived with their mothers primarily. Many of the college students described joint custody arrangements where they lived with their mothers on weekdays and their fathers on the weekends. The majority of college students also described their parents as living close to each other while growing up, enabling them to see both parents often. Finally, most of the participants described that changes in the joint custody arrangement occurred when they got their driver's license. Getting their license allowed them to go back and forth between homes as they pleased, rather than depending on their parents for transportation.

Benefits and Challenges

In this section I describe the experiences of participants as they pertain to their benefits and challenges being raised in a joint custody arrangement. I will answer the second sub-research question: *How do college students raised by divorced parents describe the benefits and challenges experienced in their joint custody arrangement?* There were three distinct themes for benefits and three distinct themes for challenges that emerged from the in-depth interviews with the male and female college students. See Table 2. Each of these have been described below.

Benefit: I liked having two homes

The first theme described as a benefit about their joint custody arrangements related to having two households. Nine out of ten participants discussed the positive experience of spending time in two different homes growing up. The majority of

participants with siblings also stated benefits of spending time at the two homes allowed them to see their siblings. For example, one female participant described how having the opportunity to spend time with each of her parents benefitted her experience in a joint custody arrangement:

I liked that I could see both of my parents and have kind of like two different lifestyles and I had a brother and sister at my mom's house so that was nice and with my dad it was just him and me. So it was kind of like only child and then siblings at the other place so it was like the best of both worlds kind of thing. (Anne).

Anne described how being able to spend time with each of her parents gave her the opportunity to have different lifestyles growing up. She felt this benefitted her by giving her the “best of both worlds.”

One male participant recounted how beneficial his experience in two different households was and the added benefits that came from having two homes:

I liked that I got to spend time with each of my parents. I liked having two homes I guess to go back and forth to. I felt like my parents were more attentive in the time that I was with them. (Trevor).

Trevor explains the benefits he got from having two households was that he was still able to see both parents and that they were more attentive in the moments he spent with each of them.

Benefit: I got to have fun with my Dad

The second theme to emerge as a benefit within their joint custody arrangements was that they got to do many fun activities with their fathers. Most of the participants

spent weekdays with their mothers and weekends with their fathers. Therefore, this allowed for the participants' fathers to do fun things with them since they did not watch over their children on school nights. These fathers tended not to make the participants have responsibilities at their homes as they saw their children for less time. The majority of college students explained fun activities or fun benefits they had when they spent time with their fathers. One female participant described the benefits of spending time with her father while in a joint custody arrangement this way:

I liked to be with my dad because we would actually go out to eat and go on trips to Bar Harbor, whatever and there was always snack food and we'd get takeout and whatever. He had more money to get me stuff and I was like an only child so I had more stuff to do and it was pretty cool. (Anne).

Anne explained that during the times with her father she was able to go on fun trips and get delicious dinners. She also described he had more of an ability to pay for fun activities than her mother did.

Another female college student described the benefits of seeing her father on the weekends:

I always saw my mom in the parental role and when I was with my dad it was more of the fun times. We could go and have a really good weekend and I was never really parented or disciplined by him. It was more just fun times. (Margaret).

Margaret explained when she spent time with her father that since she mostly saw him on the weekends they could have fun times together. She also mentioned how she was not disciplined by her father often because of their time spent together being on the weekends rather than on weekdays.

Benefit: I'm glad it was joint custody

The third theme discussed as a benefit by the college students was that they were glad their parents were awarded joint physical custody, and not sole custody. The majority of the participants stated that while the arrangement was difficult, they would not change it. The overwhelming majority discussed how joint custody was the best option. One male participant stated that joint custody was a benefit to him because it was better than seeing just one parent:

I don't know if I really would have changed anything. Like if it was going to happen, like if it was going to be a joint custody ... Or if it was going to be some sort of custody arrangement, I guess I'm glad it was a joint custody because like I said, I got to move between households pretty freely, for the most part. (Mark).

Mark stated that he was able to move between households as a benefit of having joint custody that he wouldn't have had if he had been in a sole custody arrangement.

Another female participant reasoned that although there were struggles, she would not have changed the joint custody arrangement she had:

I guess just that it wasn't all sunshine and rainbows but at the same time, there were benefits to it. It would have been amazing if my family could have stayed together, but at the same time, it didn't and I've accepted that. I think, for the most part, my family worked with what they got well. (Grace).

Grace described how not everything about having a joint custody arrangement was perfect; however, that there were benefits to the arrangement. She then concluded that she would not have changed her joint custody arrangement since she felt as though her family worked well with their circumstances.

Challenge: Packing/Forgetting Belongings

One theme that emerged as a challenge related to packing or forgetting belongings. Nine of the ten participants brought up packing and/or forgetting belongings as a major difficulty in their joint physical custody arrangements. In the following example, one female participant explained this challenge:

That's a big one actually. So, before I'd have to sleep at my dad's, this is a divorce-kid problem, but I had to pack a bag. You're young, so you never remember to pack everything. You have to plan for your entire weekend. It's really stressful, lugging all your stuff. (Penelope).

Penelope described the troubles packing to go to her father's home as forgetting her belongings and the stress it brought her.

A male participant recounts his experience with packing and forgetting belongings throughout his joint custody as a challenge:

Just living out of a gym bag sometimes, forgetting stuff at my dad's house or at my mom's house, not having things that I needed for the next day or for that day. I can remember leaving my baseball glove at my dad's house when I was going to practice from my mom's house. Just little inconvenient things like that were challenges. (Trevor).

Trevor described the challenge of packing and forgetting belongings with specific instances where he left important belongings for sports at one house when he was staying at another. He described this challenge as inconvenient for him growing up.

Challenge: I didn't get a say in my own schedule (especially early on)

A second theme discussed by the college students as a challenge was feeling as though they did not have a say in their schedule during their joint custody arrangement, especially in the early years. The majority of participants described in their interviews that they felt forced to go from one house to another and could not express their feelings about where and when they wanted to go between homes. A female college student mentioned how not having a say was a challenge in her experience in a joint custody arrangement:

I really didn't like not having a say in where I wanted to be, because in middle school if there would be an event or a birthday party or a school dance on my dad's weekend, I wasn't allowed to go because I had to be traveling to his house. I just really didn't like my whole life pretty much being planned out for me and having to tell people, "Oh no, it's my dad's weekend to have me." (Margaret).

Margaret explained the challenge of believing she didn't have a say in her joint custody arrangement as feeling as though her life was, "pretty much being planned out for [her]". This immense feeling of not having a say led her to feel obligated to miss social events that she wanted to attend. This was expressed by many of the college students interviewed for this study.

A male participant discussed how he felt as though he did not have a say in his joint custody arrangement:

I didn't like how it had to be split up and on certain holidays you'd have to visit one person's house, and then at a certain time, we'd go over to the other person's house. Like on Christmas, it would vary every year, so I'd spent Christmas Eve at my dad's house one

year, then I'd spend it at my mother's house the next year. I just didn't like how that was split up. (Nicholas).

Nicholas discussed his major problem with not having a say in his schedule for holidays. This college student described the challenge of not having a say in what home he wanted to be in for certain holidays.

Challenge: Adjusting to Dad's new home

The third theme that was a challenge discussed by the college students was adjusting to their father's new apartment or home. Since the majority of participants lived primarily with their mothers, they spent less time at their fathers' residences. Many of the college students described how their father had moved multiple times after their parents' divorce. The majority of participants expressed that at some point in their joint custody arrangement they felt uncomfortable staying or bringing friends to their father's home. One female participant talked about how she felt when going to her father's new apartment and eventually his new house:

It was hard too because my dad's apartment that he first lived in was really dingy and rundown. It didn't smell like home; it didn't feel like home. You always knew you were walking into a place that someone was calling home, but didn't really feel like it. It was just really uncomfortable. And the same kind of happened when he bought his house. It was just, it didn't feel right, and it didn't smell like my room, it was just an uncomfortable transition every time. It was just really uncomfortable. (Penelope).

Penelope brought up how the places her father lived felt uncomfortable to her. This challenge of her father moving to multiple places when she was young made Penelope feel like she was not really home when she went over to his house.

Another male college student recounted a time when his father lived in a temporary apartment that he felt uncomfortable in:

Yeah, I just didn't really like switching where I lived, and whatever. I hated my dad's temporary house thing because it was, like I said, it was empty when we were gone. So when we would go there, there would be no food, no drinks, and hardly any furniture because he was only going to be there for a short amount of time. (Alan).

Alan touched upon the challenge of hating his father living in a temporary apartment right after his parents' divorce. He stated aspects that made him uncomfortable including the apartment having no food, drinks, or much furniture since it was temporary.

Benefits and Challenges Summary

When asked about their experience being raised in a joint custody situation, three themes emerged as benefits of this arrangement, while three challenges emerged in the college students' description of being raised in a joint custody situation. As for a benefit that college students mentioned one was that they enjoyed having two homes.

Furthermore, participants described that having two homes was beneficial as they could have different lifestyles at each home. For example, some participants mentioned they could see different siblings at one home and be an only child at their other home. Another benefit the college students explained was how they could have fun with their fathers.

The majority of participants described being able to eat out and go on trips on the

weekends with their father as a benefit. The final theme found within the benefits that college students described was they were glad they had a joint custody arrangement growing up as opposed to a sole custody arrangement. Collectively, the college students agreed that it was beneficial for them to see both of their parents growing up because of their joint custody arrangement.

Themes found within college students' discussions of challenges within joint custody included packing and forgetting belongings, not having a say in the arrangement when they were younger, and having to adjust to their father's new home. The majority of college students described immense challenges with packing and forgetting their belongings. They explained going back and forth between homes often lead them to the challenge of packing and forgetting their belongings. The majority of participants also felt that early on, a challenge of their joint custody arrangement was not having a say in what home they wanted to go to and when. This challenge occurred until participants got their driver's license (mentioned previously) and were then able to have more say in where they went. The final challenge college students collectively mentioned was adjusting to their father's new homes. College students seemed to struggle adjusting to their father moving to different places they were unfamiliar with.

Impact on Relationship with Parents

In this section, I will discuss how participants describe the impact of joint custody on their relationship with each of their parents. I will answer the third sub-research question: *How do college students raised by divorced parents describe the impact the joint custody arrangement had on their relationship with each of their parents?* There

were three unique themes that emerged including a feeling of having to take a side, tensions when a parent had a new relationship, and feeling that their relationships with their parents improved with time. See Table 2. These are discussed below.

I felt like I had to choose sides

The first theme that related to college student's perceived impact on their relationship with their parents was feelings they needed to choose sides. The majority of college students expressed they felt as though they were often put in the middle and had to choose between parents during their joint custody arrangement. One female participant discussed why she felt as though she had to choose sides:

My mom would never bash my dad to us, but my dad would talk so bad about my mom, and we would see how he would treat her. So I think that it kind of made us pick sides, even though we were never told that we had to. We just kind of wanted to. (Penelope).

Penelope discussed how her parents' treatment of one another led to her and her siblings feeling though they chose sides, impacting their relationship with their father. She added that her parents never told them to choose between them, but they wanted to because of how her parents were acting.

A male participant referred to similar aspects of feeling the need to choose sides and how it impacted his relationship with his parents:

I had asked her why her and my father weren't together anymore, and she was saying all these nasty things about my father. Then I'd asked my dad the same question, and he'd say all these nasty things about my mother. It's one nasty thing where it's them constantly

talking bad about the other to try and make them look better. I definitely felt like I had to pick sides. (Nicholas).

Nicholas experienced choosing sides between both of his parents who would talk poorly about each other to him. He discussed how his relationship with his parents included hearing bad things about both parents, leading him to pick different sides throughout his joint custody arrangement.

My parent's new relationship added tension

The second theme to emerge related to the impact on college student's relationships with their parents was when their parents got into a new relationship. Half of the participants had at least one parent remarry; and for the other half whose parents did not remarry, they discussed their parents' new relationships after their divorce as being impactful. Seven of the ten college students discussed how they felt their parent was choosing their new spouse or significant other over them, which negatively impacted their relationship with their parent(s). One female participant described her experience with both parents who remarried:

With my mom, I really did not get along with my step-dad for a really long time, probably from age seven to 17. It was probably the first 10 years of them being together. We didn't get along. We fought a lot, and I always felt like my mom was picking my step-dad over me. But as I got older, I really started to appreciate both of them. So I think, with my mom, her remarriage made me kind of disrespect her a little bit, because I really didn't agree with her decision to get married. But at the end, I realized they were really just doing their best to raise me. (Margaret).

Margaret expressed exactly how her parents' remarriages impacted her relationship growing up with her parents. With her mother, she felt as though her mother was picking her step-dad over her which lead to fights growing up. However, she understood as time passed that this was a decision made in her best interest, as many other college students described.

One male college student mentioned how his father's new relationships impacted his relationship with his father growing up:

I'd say for a while, I guess, I would give him ... not give him a hard time, but he had a couple of serious girlfriends in the time and I wouldn't always be the most enthusiastic about meeting them. Some of them had kids and I really didn't care to hang out or talk to the kids. Sometimes you get upset about that but that got better as I got older, though.

(Mark).

Mark explained that when his father would get into new relationships this added tension with their relationship, especially when the girlfriend had kids of her own. He added that although he got upset growing up that he became more understanding as he aged.

Time heals

The third and final theme that related to the impact on the relationship with their parents was that time heals. Collectively, the participants all agreed that as time went on in the joint custody arrangement that their relationship with their parent(s) grew stronger. One male participant described how time healed his relationship with his parents this way:

Yeah, I would say the same, if anything, better. Like I said, I have respect for both of them that they have to go through that. As hard as it was on us, I know it was hard on them as well. (Trevor).

Trevor, looking back on his joint custody arrangement, stated how he now realized how his relationships have improved with his parents and how he respects all that his parents went through to raise him while co-parenting.

Another female participant explained the growth the relationship with her mother has undergone over time:

I respect her a lot more because I saw how much she struggled to raise me by her own. She never got any child support from my dad. So I really respect that she did it all by herself and had me so much of the time. So I think it really made our relationship a lot stronger now, 'cause I really recognize how much she did for me. (Margaret).

Margaret did not see all her mother did for her as a child, but now as time has passed she can appreciate her mother in a way she did not growing up making time heal the relationship.

Impact on Relationship with Parents Summary

The interviews revealed three common themes related to how the joint custody arrangement impacted participant's relationships with their parents. The first theme was the majority of college students felt like they had to choose sides and this was often attributed to negative feelings their parents had toward each other. Second, the majority of college students discussed how their parent's new relationship added tension between them and their parents. Many had parents who went on to establish other romantic

relationships or remarried and this created stress in the parent-child relationship. Finally, the participants collectively described that as time progressed, their relationships with their parents improved. Many acknowledged the strain experienced in their relationship with their parents in the early years following the divorce, and how time healed the strain in the relationships with their parents.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The fourth section will address suggestions and recommendations for specific groups that emerged from the interviews. In this section, I will answer the fourth sub research question: *What suggestions/recommendations do college students who were raised by divorced parents have for others (children, parents, lawyers and judges) in order to make the joint custody arrangement successful?* In terms of what college students offered for suggestions and recommendations in order to make joint custody arrangements successful, two distinct themes emerged for children who find themselves in joint custody arrangements, as well as two themes for parents, and two themes for the lawyers and judges. See Table 2. These will be discussed below.

For children in joint custody: It's not your fault

The first of two themes to emerge related to college students' suggestions recommendations to other children in joint custody was to not think their parent's divorce was their fault. Eight of the ten participants when asked about what suggestions or recommendations they would give children in joint custody they stated children must

know their parent's separation was not because of them. One male participant discussed what he would tell a child in the same situation he went through growing up:

I feel that kids always have that preconceived thing where it's when their parents go through a divorce; they think it's their fault, which a lot of the time isn't the case. I would say that nine times out of 10, it's probably not because of you, it's their own ... it's a thing between the two of them and hopefully, they're just trying to do what's best for the child. (Nicholas).

Nicholas wanted children in joint custody to know that their parents' divorce was not because of them. He notes that parents' divorces are between them and that children should never place blame on themselves, even if this may be difficult.

Another female participant echoed what Nicholas stated when giving suggestions and recommendations to other children in joint custody:

I would definitely say that it is not your fault and that you are not the reason or the cause of the problem. And it gets better, I guess. (Miranda).

Miranda gave the recommendation to children in joint custody to never think they are the cause of the problem between their parents and to not blame themselves for those problems. She finally concluded that joint custody gets better.

For children in joint custody: Communicate with your parents

The second theme that emerged when college students described their suggestions and recommendations to other children in joint custody was to communicate with their parents. All of the participants echoed that communication is a necessary key to creating a successful joint custody arrangement. One female participant's

suggestion/recommendation to children in joint custody was to have good communication with parents no matter what:

My gut says, I would tell kids to advocate for themselves, and advocate for how they're feeling. A lot of times I felt like I was just kind of going through the motions and being complacent, because I didn't want to fight with my mom. Or I didn't want to make a problem, or be a cause of stress for her. But, I mean, I think that feeling like I couldn't speak up, really inhibited me. (Penelope).

Penelope tells children to always be open and communicate with how they are feeling with their joint custody arrangement to parents.

Another female participant maintained good communication with both parents as a necessary suggestion/recommendation to children in joint custody:

Definitely communicate with your parents. Tell them how you feel about your relationship with them and about their relationship, and even about the arrangement, too. If you don't like it, then you should tell them. (Miranda).

Miranda stated that no matter what the child feels, they should feel open to communicating everything about their joint custody arrangement to both of their parents.

For the parents: Keep the peace

The first of two themes that surfaced related to college students' suggestions and recommendations to parents who have joint custody was for parents to keep the peace. All of the college students in their responses highlighted how important it is for parents with joint custody to have a civil co-parenting relationship with one another. Students mentioned that parents do not need to talk poorly of one another to kids; they do not need

to fight in front of their children, and several other factors relating to parental civility with one another. One female participant discussed her main suggestion/recommendation to parents who have joint custody:

I would say divorced parents need to put their differences aside for the sake of the child. Deciding to get a divorce when you still have young children is a really hard decision. But it's something that will affect the child for the rest of their life and will affect the relationships they have. So it's really important to make sure you're listening to them and to make sure you're putting the differences aside for the sake of the child, and making things as normal as possible. (Margaret).

Margaret stressed the need for parents to put their differences aside for the wellbeing of their child when in joint custody arrangements. She recognized the difficulty of this task for parents, but tells them how they act with one another will affect their child for the rest of their lives.

Another male participant restated the need for parents who have joint custody to keep the peace with one another:

Just keep your thoughts about the other parent to yourself, because it will ultimately just weaken the connection that the kid has with you. Support your kids, because they need it. It's a tough time for everyone. And learn how to have a civil conversation with the other parent because kids don't want to hear their parents arguing, or see it. (Alan).

Alan emphasized how talking poorly of one parent to their child will weaken their relationship with the other parent which is not something parents with joint custody should be doing. He also mentioned how parents must learn to have civil conversations because of the impact their fighting can have on their children.

For the parents: It's all about the child

The second theme that surfaced related to college students' suggestions and recommendations to parents was to stay focused on the child when navigating a joint custody arrangement. One female participant described how parents should focus on their children solely throughout a joint custody arrangement:

They should communicate about what's going on with their children and how the roles differ between the households and probably try and come up with similar setting like at least in the way they treat their children and rules and stuff like that. Just think about the child more than the other partner and how they might have any negative feelings. It's all about the child. (Anne).

Anne explained that parents need to think about the child more than the other parent and to make sure both parents know what's going on with the child. Anne stated that when parents are communicating it should be solely about the child to make sure that consistency is within both households rather than talking about their negative feelings about one another.

A male college student discussed a similar suggestion/recommendation to parents with joint custody of their children:

I mean, I would say focus on what the kid wants because they're just a kid. That should be the focus more than any other thing. I just feel like you should make him happy or her happy. Focus on the kid always. (David).

David repeated the need for parents to focus on their child several times as his suggestion to parents who have been awarded joint custody. He stated the priority of parents is to focus on their children at all times to make the arrangement successful.

For the lawyers/judges: Ask the child for input

The first of two themes to emerge as a suggestion or recommendation to lawyers/judges in order to make joint custody arrangements successful was to be sure to ask the children for input. Collectively, the participants noted in their suggestions and recommendations to lawyers and judges that in order for them to know what will work for a family they must get input from the child. The college students noted that the child could give input since they will be the ones moving back and forth between households. One male participant explained his suggestions to lawyers and judges in family courts this way:

I would say just to listen to both the parents and the kids. Kids are young, but they ultimately know their parents better than a lawyer does, personality wise. They've seen them at their worst, and so, yeah. (Alan).

Alan stated that children should be asked for their input when deciding on a joint custody arrangement and schedule in addition to the parents' viewpoints. Alan emphasized that children know their parents better than a third party does and for that reason their views are vital in the decision-making process.

Another female college student described her suggestion/recommendation to lawyers and judges involved in child custody decisions:

I'd probably say to think about the kids again. To think about how it would affect them to not see one of their parents as often, and about how the parent treats them is obviously a big factor in whether they should see them more or less. But sometimes it's better for someone not to see one of their parents, maybe they're just toxic, but it's really important that they get to express their feelings as children. (Anne).

In her suggestion, Anne concluded by stressing the importance of children being able to express their feelings during this process.

For the lawyers/judges: Focus on both parents' sides

The second theme that arose that related to college students' suggestions and recommendations to lawyers or judges in order to make joint custody arrangements successful was for these groups to focus on both parents' thoughts and desires. The majority of college students noted that both parents should be given equal opportunity in court proceedings. Many participants cited factors that should not be focused on when deciding on child custody. For example, college students said the gender of the parent and what parent is a better talker in court should not determine what parent gets more time with their child. One male participant discussed his suggestion/recommendation to lawyers and judges in family courts regarding equality of parents' sides:

I know that, just based on my own knowledge and research and stuff that I've done, I know that a lot of the time the courts like to rule in favor of the mother regardless of the circumstances. But I feel like, in order to make an educated decision, they need to look at both sides of the argument. Weigh the pros and cons on both sides, and not just pick the mother because that's the person that gave birth to the child. You should pick the one that the child identifies with most and feels that the child will have a better ... will be able to grow up more comfortably. (Nicholas).

Nicholas explained that he was aware many judges decide in favor of mothers to have residential custody of children within joint custody arrangements. He said he believes

that this is not the key to successful joint custody arrangements and to make a successful arrangement, both parents' sides must be equally weighed.

Another female college student described how she wished the judge and lawyer had looked into her father's ability to parent before deciding on the joint custody arrangement:

I wish people had gone a little further back into how he's been mentally and socially with people, I feel like the arrangement would've been a lot different. Cause in my case, my dad is so charismatic, and so social, so outgoing, everyone loves him. But, if you talk to people who are close to him, his family members, his kids, you get a completely different picture painted. I mean, I don't really know what was said or what happened during the meetings where the arrangement was agreed. But, I just wish that the lawyers and the judges involved with the case had a better understanding of my dad and had a better understanding of my mom. (Penelope).

Penelope described how she believed that when her joint custody arrangement was agreed upon, that the judges did not listen to both of her parents' sides fairly. She mentioned how she wished the lawyers and judges had a better understanding of her father and her mother's lives rather than just judging and making decisions based on how they acted in a court setting.

Suggestions and Recommendations Summary

College students had many suggestions and recommendations for making joint custody arrangements successful. They offered several recommendations to other children who find themselves in joint custody, to parents, and to the lawyers and judges

involved in such decisions. The themes that arose within college students' recommendations to children in joint custody arrangements were to make sure they know their parents' divorce is not their fault and to not blame themselves for their parents' decision to divorce. The other theme found within participants' suggestions and recommendations to children of joint custody was to encourage them to communicate with their parents. Collectively, the college students wanted children of joint custody to know they should be open about how they are feeling about the arrangement and if they want any changes.

As for college students' suggestions and recommendations for parents who have joint custody, two main themes arose. The first theme was that every participant gave the suggestion to parents to keep the peace in their relationship with each other. The college students noted that it is important for parents of children in joint custody to remain civil and avoid fighting, especially in front of their children. Secondly, the majority of college students gave the suggestion to parents that to ensure a successful joint custody arrangement and co-parenting, they should make their child a priority, rather than focus on their differences with their former spouse or on a new romantic relationship.

Finally, within college students' suggestions and recommendations to lawyers and judges in family courts two themes emerged. The first was that college students gave the suggestion for lawyers and judges to ask children for their input. Participants noted that they had not been asked for input and yet believed it is important for children to be asked what they would like to see out of their custody arrangement and what their schedule may look like. Secondly, college students advised lawyers and judges to focus on both parents' input before awarding joint custody. They felt that to make joint custody

arrangements successful, assumptions should not be made about a parent's ability to parent due to gender or income.

Chapter Summary

This study sought to understand how college students raised in joint custody arrangements describe their experience. The interviews revealed many common themes related to the experience, the perceived benefits and challenges, the impact on their relationship with their parents after the divorce, and important suggestions and recommendations they offer to other children, parents, as well as lawyers and judges.

As described above, these college men and women shared similar experiences in their joint custody arrangements. Almost all described that while their parents were awarded joint custody and shared in the parenting responsibilities, their mother was whom they resided with and who was awarded primary residency. They also mentioned how despite the divorce and their parents living apart, their parents lived close by to one another, making movement between the homes easier. In addition, they noted that once they got their driver's license, they were able to have more control over the schedule and more input into when they came and went.

The majority of college students interviewed identified benefits that included having two places they could call home, offering separate times to be with each parent. They also described the benefit of having their father's on weekends, which allowed for more time to have fun with their fathers. They also reported being satisfied with knowing their parents were jointly responsible for them – that both parents were invested in parenting them and spending time with them (versus being awarded sole custody). On the

other hand, these college students reported challenges to being in a joint custody arrangement. Most described the practical issue of packing to move from one house to the other and forgetting things to bring. In addition, the feeling of not having a say over the schedule, especially in the early years of the divorce, was difficult. And many described the difficulty of adjusting to their father's new apartment or home.

In terms of their relationship with each parent following the divorce, most talked about how they felt they needed to pick sides, even if their parent did not explicitly say so. They also had to adjust to one or both parents beginning a new dating relationship or marrying, which added feelings of no longer being a priority. In addition, most students felt that while there was some strain or awkwardness with their parents in the early years of the arrangement, time has allowed them to work through issues and many described having a better relationship now.

The college students were in agreement on their recommendations and suggestions. For children, they felt it was important that they understand the divorce was not their fault, and they should be able to communicate their needs and feelings to their parents. For parents, many talked about the importance of getting along with the ex-spouse for the sake of the child, and make it clear that they are keeping the focus on the child. For lawyers and judges, the college students felt it is important to ask the child for input into the joint custody arrangement, and to be sure to listen to both parents, in terms of their thoughts on what is going to be best for the child. For example, don't just assume all children should live primarily with the mother.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

This study sought to explore how college students perceived their experiences growing up in joint custody arrangements. Currently, there is little research on how joint custody is experienced from the perspective of the children or adult children. This study is unique because the impact of joint custody from the child's perspective has too often been overlooked. In addition, this study is timely, as joint custody arrangements have become the norm in child custody decisions. It is my hope that this study will add to the existing body of research concerning the perspectives of joint custody from college students who experienced this common custody arrangement.

This study included 10 college students between the ages of 19-21 who were asked to describe their experience growing up in a joint custody arrangement (See Table 1). Each person was raised by divorced parents in a joint custody arrangement that included time residing with each parent; their joint physical custody arrangement involved at least one-third of their time spent residing with each parent. In addition, their parents' divorce happened while they were in elementary school (or before) which allowed them to have significant experience with growing up in a divorced family. As part of the interview, each person was asked about benefits and challenges, the impact this arrangement had on their relationship with their parents, and recommendations and suggestions for others. Many themes emerged, which were described in detail in the previous chapter, that painted a picture of the complexities experienced by these college students who grew up

in a joint custody arrangement (See Table 2).

Within this chapter, I will compare my findings with previous research. I will also discuss the limitations, recommendations and suggestions for children, parents, and lawyers and judges, as well as suggestions for future research.

Comparison of Findings to Previous Research

Description of their Experience

Eight of the ten college students described their joint custody arrangement as primarily living with their mothers. The students described living with their mothers on the weekdays and living with their fathers on the weekends. This type of schedule has been found in many previous studies of joint custody arrangements (Wilkinson, 1992; Sopp, 2003; Nielson, 2011; Nielson, 2013; Meyer, Cancian & Cook, 2017), in which the mother takes on the responsibilities for daily living (getting the child/children to school, doctor's appointments, after school activities) and the father has the child(ren) on the weekend.

In addition, for the college students interviewed for this study, most said their parents lived close to each other following the divorce. This has been a finding described in other studies of joint custody arrangements, as parents with this arrangement have been found to make more of a commitment to reside closer to one another (Lakin, 1994). The close proximity of parents may be a determining factor for the ability to have a successful joint custody arrangement, and may reflect the parents' understanding that in order for the children to reside with them, they must remain close. Most students described how "it made things so much easier."

Additionally, the majority of the college students described how their arrangement became more fluid once they got their driver's license. This finding was unique to this study and has not been addressed in previous research. Having a driver's license allowed them to have more autonomy in the custody schedule, and the freedom to move between households based on their other high school activities. "It was a game changer" as one student said.

Benefits and Challenges

Collectively, the college students believed that joint custody was the best arrangement for them and their divorced parents. This arrangement was preferred over their parents being awarded sole custody, which many felt would have meant not having access to or spending time with both parents. In fact, the majority of college students felt that having two different homes to go back and forth between was a great benefit for them growing up. They enjoyed having two separate environments where they could experience different benefits of each of their homes. For example, at one home they may have had pets and at another they may have half-siblings. This finding was supported in previous studies which found that children in joint custody enjoyed having access to both parents by living in two homes (Steinman, 1981; Sopp 2003).

They also felt a major benefit of the joint custody arrangement was all the fun they had with their father. Most said they spent weekdays with their mother, who was described by one person as the "discipline parent," and their weekends when they weren't in school with their "fun dad." This finding is consistent with previous studies by Ilfeld (1989) and Melli & Brown (2008), who found that children in joint custody arrangements

spend more time with their fathers doing activities that were viewed as fun and enjoyable to the child. This particular finding raises questions about the joint custody schedule set by the court and/or agreed upon by the parents and the impact this has on each parent's responsibilities. The students clearly described seeing their father as the "fun parent" while their mothers were viewed as the "responsible parent" who did the mundane parenting duties and discipline. Perhaps there could be a more balanced custody arrangement in order for each parent to be viewed as sharing in the day-to-day responsibilities as well as the entertainment. This joint custody scheduling issue has resulted in negatively impacting participants' relationships with their mothers and improving the relationship with their fathers. Both parents sharing the day-to-day responsibilities could help mothers by removing some of the burden off of them and allowing them time to make fun memories together. Although determining a balanced joint custody schedule in which the child or children can see their mothers more on the weekends and fathers more on the weekdays may be difficult, in the end this would help relationships with both parents be more equivalent. This may require parents to live in the same school district as well as live relatively close, in which the majority of parents did in this study.

Despite the many benefits of joint custody, the students also were quick to mention the challenges. All of them described the difficulty of packing up to go back and forth between homes and forgetting things they needed or wanted at one of their homes. Previous studies have described similar challenges, in terms of children feeling overburdened by the demands of maintaining a presence in two different homes (Steinman, 1981). In addition, many felt as though they did not have a say in their

schedule when they were younger. The majority of college students described how, prior to getting their licenses, they struggled with feeling as though they had no say in what house they went to and when. Previous research has discussed this challenge of loss of autonomy for children in joint custody arrangements (Sopp, 2003; Nielson, 2013).

Another challenge described in detail by the participants was the difficulty in adjusting to their father's new home, which did not feel like home. This finding supports previous research which has found that one of the most undesirable effects of divorce on children was the number of post-divorce residential moves (Melli & Brown, 2008). In this study, the majority of participants lived with their mother in the same house they lived in before the divorce. As a result of their parents' divorce, their father moved out, and he also moved multiple times (often due to a new relationship/marriage). Therefore, it was their adjustment to their father's new residence on the weekends that was a major challenge for the participants.

Impact on Relationship with Parents

When asked about how their parent's divorce impacted their relationship with each parent, all felt as though they experienced the need to choose sides at some point after their parents' divorce. This was especially true for them in the early years after the divorce when they felt that there was the most tension between their parents. Previous research has found that parental conflict can have a significant impact on children growing up in joint custody (Duran-Aydintug, 1997; Lee, 2002). These previous studies found that parental conflict negatively impact the children, and specifically identify "choosing sides" as a feeling many children have when their parents do not get along.

Many researchers have stressed the importance for parents to provide low conflict environments for their children (Wilkinson 1992; Duran-Aydintug, 1997; Lee, 2002; Sopp, 2003). It is important to keep children out of any disagreements that may arise between their parents throughout their joint custody arrangement, regardless if the argument may seem small. Children who may overhear their parents arguing about the arrangement could begin to blame themselves for their parent's divorce since they are in the middle. Even though the divorce and arguing was not their fault, the majority of participants did mention at some time they believed their parent's divorce was their fault which may correlate with the amount of conflict between their parents.

The college students interviewed for this study also discussed how a major source of strain was created when one of their parents got into a new love relationship after their divorce. This was not limited to those whose parents remarried, but included even dating relationships. Many talked about how they became less of a priority, how the new relationship impacted their time spent with their parent, and brought other factors such as new half-siblings or step-siblings into their lives. As noted in previous research, it is not unusual to see children with joint custody arrangements struggle with their parents' remarriage and adjusting to the new spouse (Sopp, 2003). This may suggest that parents should move more cautiously before introducing a new partner to their children, with the understanding that this may create a strain on their relationship.

Despite the challenges, all the college students mentioned how their relationship with each parent improved over the span of their joint custody arrangements, and as more than one student stated "time heals." A previous study by Sopp (2003) had similar conclusions that support the notion of time healing the parent-child relationship. Their

study found that adult children who grew up in joint custody arrangements reported their relationships with their parents improved over time (Sopp, 2003). While joint custody arrangements may bring tension, especially initially or with the addition of the parent's new partner, overtime, children's relationships with their parents have been shown to improve.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study beginning with the small sample size of just 10 college students. Despite having a sample of five men and five women, I was unable to find any unique themes that were gender specific. I completed in-depth interviews only with only college students who volunteered [and without their parents' input]. The interviews relied on the participant's ability to recall as well as their perceptions of events which could not be verified. This study was confined to University of Maine students, most who grew up in Maine and did not present an ethnically or economically diverse group. As with all qualitative studies, generalizing cannot be done due to the limited number of participants.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, as well as the specific recommendations of the participants, there are several recommendations for children and parents who are involved in joint custody arrangements. Specific suggestions are made as well for the lawyers and judges involved in deciding joint custody cases.

For the children

The majority of college students wanted children like themselves to know their parents' divorce was not their fault; it was their parents' decision to divorce. The majority of the college students interviewed for this study described how they initially blamed themselves for their parents' divorce and that things may have been easier if they understood that earlier on. With time, they came to realize their parent's divorce was not their fault. This points to the need for parents to remind their children that this was never their fault, but a decision between their parents.

The other recommendation for children involved speaking up. The majority of college students mentioned that at some point they weren't satisfied with certain aspects of the joint custody arrangement, such as; not being at their mother's home on the weekends, feeling forced to go back and forth, and splitting holidays. They wished they had felt confident enough to speak up to their parents about what they wanted to change. It is important for parents (and the court) to realize that as time progresses, children may want changes in the joint custody arrangement, but they may feel too nervous to speak up. My suggestion would be for parents to constantly ask and check in about how the child is feeling about their arrangement and schedule. This burden to communicate should not lay solely on the child.

For the parents

The majority of participants described how important it is for parents to "keep the peace." Specifically, college students felt strongly that parents should not argue in front of their children. This current study supports previous studies that have found that

children of joint custody notice parents' conflict and therefore strongly advise parents that their conflict needs to be minimized for the benefit of children.

The other recommendation for parents centered on keeping the child a priority. Most talked about how advantageous it was to have both parents living close by (sometimes in the same town). But many college students interviewed for this study also felt as though their parents were being selfish at times by focusing on themselves rather than their children during their joint custody arrangement. For example, when becoming involved in a new love relationship, parents should try to maintain the schedule set out to be with their children. In addition, involve the child in any new decisions or planned changes. Try to make decisions that will benefit the child.

For the lawyers and judges

The majority of college students felt it was important for the lawyers and even the judge to hear directly from the child. Many wanted their opinions to be heard about what they wanted in the joint custody arrangement. Many felt strongly that lawyers and judges should take into account the views of the child to ensure the arrangement will benefit them instead of benefitting just the parents. Asking for children's input could improve the success of joint custody arrangements.

Participants also wanted to be sure that judges listened to both parents' sides. The majority of the participants felt as though one of their parents was either not listened to fairly enough in court or one parent was the "smoother talker" in court resulting in an arrangement in their favor. These college students felt that lawyers and judges had not always weighed both parents' sides equally, which resulted in an arrangement not as

successful as it could have been. For example, some felt that certain decisions were based on one parents' gender or salary and not necessarily on what was best for the child. One way to address these suggestions would be for lawyers and judges in family courts to be required to take courses on families and child development. This would help them to understand an array of complex family dynamics which may be undetectable in court in order for them to make the proper custody arrangements.

Future Research

As noted at the beginning, joint custody is a common arrangement in custody decisions. It would be beneficial to study joint custody over various age groups. In addition, comparing the experiences of those who experienced joint custody early in life to those who experienced it in their teen years would be useful. Conducting more studies that are able to compare the experience of girls versus boys would be helpful to find possible gender differences.

The participants in this study lived primarily with their mothers. Future studies could examine those who live primarily with their father. Moreover, studies of children in joint custody arrangements with same-sex parents will add to our understanding of the experience.

In addition, comparing children in joint custody arrangements where there is high vs. low parent conflict could be useful. To gain the most understanding of this experience, it would be advantageous to interview children and their parents, and perhaps others (e.g., step-parents, teachers, coaches), as this would give a more comprehensive picture of the joint custody experience.

Conclusion

Since the emergence of joint custody in the 1970's, many families and judges have decided that joint or shared parenting (vs. sole parenting) is in the best interest of children (Melli & Brown, 2008). There have been a myriad of research studies on children of divorce; however, joint custody studies are much more difficult to come across. Over two decades ago, the American Psychological Association published a report to the U.S. Commission on Child and Family Welfare that summarized and evaluated research regarding joint custody (Fournier & Perry, 1995). The report stated that joint custody was associated with positive outcomes for children, including adjustment, decreased parent conflict, and increased parental involvement (especially father involvement). Many of these research studies obtained their information through surveys and from the parents' perspectives.

This study was unique in that it used a qualitative methodology to investigate the experiences of college students raised by divorced parents who were in joint custody arrangements. Although this custody arrangement is typical, few studies have examined how the children involved have experienced this arrangement. Interviews with 10 college students revealed a host of common themes, suggesting that there are similar experiences for children of divorce who find themselves in a joint custody arrangement. While there were certainly identified benefits to joint custody (e.g., access to both parents, increased involvement by fathers), there are still challenges (e.g., the practical side of having your belongings in two places, adjusting to dad's new home) – even in joint custody arrangements. By understanding the experiences of children, we can continue to help

parents navigate and improve their joint custody arrangements for the benefit of everyone involved.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER/ANNOUNCEMENT

Exploring Joint Custody:

Interviews with College Students about their Childhood Experiences

Hello, my name is Marissa Zink and I am a student in the Honors College at the University of Maine. I am working under Dr. Sandra Caron, my faculty advisor. I am doing a research project about joint custody arrangements. More specifically, I am interested in speaking with University of Maine college students between the ages of 18-22 who were raised by divorced parents in a joint custody arrangement that included time residing with each parent. For the purpose of this study, a joint physical custody arrangement will be defined as at least one-third of your time spent residing with each parent. Your parents divorce needs to have happened while you were in elementary school (or before) in order to have significant experience on you growing up in a divorced family (5 or more years).

I am currently looking for college students to interview. The interview will be confidential and recorded, if you agree. If you do not agree to the recording, I will take detailed notes. No names will be included in my report; no names will be attached to the interview notes. The interview will take place at a mutually determined location. The interview will be about an hour long, and will consist of gathering some background information (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, age when parent's divorced), along with a series of questions about your experiences growing up in a joint custody situation. You will be asked to describe your own joint custody arrangement, the benefits and challenges, and impact on your relationship with each parent while growing up in a joint custody arrangement. Finally, you will be asked to provide any suggestions or recommendations for how others (e.g., children, parents, lawyers, judges) might ensure that this type of custody arrangement is successful.

If you meet the criteria for participation and would consider participating in this research study, please contact me at marissa.zink@maine.edu. If you know someone who meets the criteria, please forward this email to them to inform them about my research. Email will be used to recruit, however, it is not secure. Any email correspondence with participants will be deleted after the completion of the interview.

Thank you.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How do college students who were raised by divorced parents in joint custody arrangements describe their experiences?

Demographics:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Ethnicity
4. How old were you (what grade were you in) when your parent's divorced?
5. How many siblings did you have at the time of your parent's divorce?

How do college students raised by divorced parents describe their joint custody arrangement?

1. How did the joint custody arrangement work?
2. How was your time shared between parents? Did you live primarily with mother? Father? Equally with both? Did your parents live close to each other?
3. Did changes in the arrangement occur over time? If so, how did it change?

How do college students raised by divorced parents describe the benefits and challenges experienced in their joint custody arrangement?

1. What did you like about the joint custody arrangement? Benefits of staying with your mother? Your father?
2. What did you dislike about the joint custody arrangement? Challenges of staying with your mother? Your father?

3. What were the benefits and challenges of moving between households?
4. What about the impact on school? Friends? Your belongings (e.g. toys, clothes)?
5. If you could have changed the custody arrangement, how would you have changed it?

How do college students raised by divorced parents describe the impact their joint custody arrangement had on their relationship with each of their parents?

1. How was your relationship with your mother impacted by the joint custody arrangement? How do you feel your current relationship with her has been impacted?
2. How was your relationship with your father impacted by the joint custody arrangement? How do you feel your current relationship with him has been impacted?
3. How was your parent's relationship with each other following the divorce? Do you feel this had an impact on your relationship with either of them?
4. Did either of your parents remarry after their divorce?
5. If so, how do you feel this impacted your relationship with your parent(s)?

What suggestions or recommendations do college students who were raised by divorced parents have for others in order to make the joint custody arrangement successful?

1. What advice would you give children growing up in joint custody arrangements?
2. What advice would you give divorced parents in joint custody arrangements?
3. What advice would you give lawyers and judges about joint custody arrangements?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

(given to those who contacted me to be interviewed for this study)

Exploring Joint Custody:

Interviews with College Students about their Childhood Experiences

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Marissa Zink, a student in the Honors College at the University of Maine. Her faculty advisor is Dr. Sandra Caron, Professor of Family Relations and Human Sexuality. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of college students with divorced parents who were in joint custody arrangements.

The criteria for the study will be college students' ages 18-22 who were raised by divorced parents in a joint custody arrangement that included time residing with each parent. The joint physical custody will be defined as at least one-third of their time spent residing with each parent. Their parents divorce needs to have happened while they were in elementary school (or before) in order to have significant experience growing up in a divorced family (5 or more years).

What will you be asked to do? If you meet the criteria and decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed about your experiences surrounding joint custody. Nothing will link your name to the interview. Interviews will be taped whenever possible, but due to the sensitive nature of the study, it is understood you may not be willing to be recorded. In that case, extensive notes will be taken. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete and will take place at a location decided and agreed upon by both the interviewer and interviewee. My study will ask you question about your experiences growing up in a joint custody situation. You will be asked to describe your own joint custody arrangement, the benefits and challenges, and impact on your relationship with each of your parents while growing up in a joint custody arrangement. Finally, you will be asked to provide any suggestions or recommendations for how others (e.g., children, parents, lawyers, judges) might ensure that this type of custody arrangement is successful.

Risks – There is the possibility that you may become uncomfortable answering these questions. There is also the possibility that you may re-experience some of the emotions associated with growing up in a joint custody arrangement by answering the questions. You may decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or discontinue the interview at any point.

Benefits – While this study may have no direct benefit to you, this research will help us learn more about joint custody arrangements from the child’s perspective, and assist others who may be involved in joint custody decisions (children, parents, lawyers, judges).

Confidentiality – Your name will not be on any documents for this study. A pseudonym will be assigned to each interview to protect your identity. Nothing will link your name to this interview. If you are willing to be taped, your interview will be transcribed by the primary investigator and the content from the taped interview will be deleted by September 2018. The notes and transcription from the interview will be kept indefinitely in a locked office. Only the investigator and her faculty advisor will have access to this information. All email correspondence will be deleted after completion of the interview.

Voluntary – Participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time during the interview. You may skip any questions you do not want to answer.

Contact Information – If you have any questions about this research, please contact the primary investigator, Marissa Zink, by emailing: marissa.zink@maine.edu

You may also contact the faculty advisor of this study, Dr. Sandra Caron, by calling 581-3138 or emailing her at: scaron@maine.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, University of Maine, [207/581-1498](tel:2075811498) or [207/581-2657](tel:2075812657) (or e-mail umric@maine.edu).

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Marissa D. Zink was born in Mobile, Alabama on December 19th, 1996. She was raised in Minot, Maine and graduated from Poland Regional High School in 2015. Majoring in Child Development and Family Relations, Marissa also has a minor in Legal Studies. She has served on the executive boards for Alpha Phi, Order of Omega, Alpha Lamda Delta, and Her Campus in her time at the University of Maine. Marissa has spent her final two semesters interning at law firms to gain more knowledge of the legal field.

Upon graduation, Marissa plans to take a gap year to study for the LSAT and work before attending law school in the fall of 2019. Her goal is to blend her knowledge of families and law to become a family lawyer after the completion of her law degree.