

2014

Loss of the Parent-Child Relationship after Divorce: Does Custodial Arrangement Matter?

Sara M. Czapiewski

University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.stthomas.edu/ssw_mstrp

Part of the [Clinical and Medical Social Work Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Czapiewski, Sara M., "Loss of the Parent-Child Relationship after Divorce: Does Custodial Arrangement Matter?" (2014). *Social Work Master's Clinical Research Papers*. 302.

https://ir.stthomas.edu/ssw_mstrp/302

This Clinical research paper is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Work at UST Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in Social Work Master's Clinical Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UST Research Online. For more information, please contact libroadmin@stthomas.edu.

Loss of the Parent-Child Relationship after Divorce: Does Custodial Arrangement Matter?

by

Sara M. Czapiewski, B.S.W., LSW

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work

Committee Members
Ade A. Nesmith, Ph.D., LISW
Harriet Kohen, LICSW
Linda Van Ryn, B.S.N.

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis or a dissertation.

Abstract

Today about 50 percent of marriages end in divorce and 40 percent of these divorces have children involved. Divorce can be a traumatic event and because of this divorce can be considered an ambiguous loss. This study looked at the losses that could be experienced by children from a parental divorce. Using attachment theory as the lens, literature was reviewed surrounding the effects of divorce on children. After completing the literature review the loss of the parent-child relationship was the primary focus for this study. A quantitative study was conducted to answer the question: does the custodial arrangement alleviate or exacerbate the loss of the parent-child relationship after a parental divorce? A total of 74 respondents, who experienced a parental divorce as a child, completed a survey to determine their legal custodial arrangement after the divorce and their Parent Child Relationship Survey (PCRS) scale score for both mother and father. The findings of this study concluded that there is a significant difference between a respondent in one legal custodial arrangement to a respondent with a different legal custodial arrangement and their mean PCRS scale score for father but not for mother. Recommendations for further research of other factors that can influence respondent's parent-child relationship and research before and after the divorce occurred would be beneficial. Implications for social workers were also discussed in providing more education to parents and children experiencing a divorce to support resilience.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take a chance to thank everyone who has supported me in this research journey and the last two years of pursuing my Masters of Social Worker degree. A huge thank you goes to my committee members, Professor Ande Nesmith for always answering all my questions, reassuring me I was on the right track, setting up multiple meetings with me to figure out the statistics for my research, and giving great feedback for improvements, Harriet Kohen and Linda Van Ryn, for thoroughly reading my research paper, giving me great recommendations for improvement, and taking time out of their busy schedules to meet for my committee meetings. I also cannot thank the respondents enough for taking the time to complete the survey. Without you this research paper could not have been the success that it is.

Finally I give a huge thank you to all my family and friends who have supported me through this two year adventure of pursuing my masters. I thank you for always being there to listen to me vent, for understanding if I could not make it to an event, and giving me the confidence that I can do it! Lastly, to Zach who took the brunt of my stress, thank you for understanding everything that was on my plate, for several dinners cooked, and for telling me how proud you are of me. Without you guys in my life supporting me, I do not know how I would have finished. Just know I am so thankful and hope I give you just as much love and support back.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	8
a. Importance of Attachment.....	8
b. Parent-Child Relationship.....	9
c. Financial Stability and Belongings.....	11
d. Trust and Relationships.....	12
e. Increase in Behavior Concerns.....	12
f. Emotional Well-Being.....	13
g. Decline in Academics.....	14
h. Custodial Arrangements.....	16
Conceptual Framework.....	19
Methods.....	21
a. Research Design.....	21
b. Sample.....	21
c. Protection of Human Subjects.....	22
d. Measures.....	23
e. Data Analysis.....	24
f. Strengths and Limitations.....	27
Findings.....	29
Discussion.....	38
References.....	43
Appendix A.....	49

The rate of divorce in the United States hit its peak in the 1980s at 50 percent of marriages ending in divorce. In 2011, there was a rate of 6.8 marriages per 1,000 people. In that same year, 3.6 marriages ended in divorce (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). This shows the divorce rate has remained about the same since its peak. Of these divorces, about 40 percent of them have children involved (Divorce Statistics, n.d.). Since the divorce rate is still at a high level it is important to acknowledge the negative and positive effects it has on the individuals involved. Of the individuals involved, it is most important to understand how it affects the children and their future development. To develop a better understanding of how divorce affects children it is important to look at what divorce is and how individuals and society view divorce. This will show the affects of divorce and assist in developing ways to alleviate the negative effects.

Children of parents who have experienced divorce understand the pain and hurt that can be caused by divorce. What people do not always realize is that divorce can cause several losses. These losses can affect the person for a lifetime which makes divorce an ambiguous loss (Boss, 2012; Rogers, 2004). Ambiguous loss is defined as a loss that is unclear and traumatic. It is traumatic because it can continue over long periods of time with little or no closure (Boss, 2012). An example of divorce being an ambiguous loss is a physically absent parent due to the divorce (Boss, 2012): if the parents' divorce did not end well or if the father or mother who does not have custody of the children decided to leave the family and not return. Divorce not only affects the individuals going through the divorce but also the children, other family members, and friends close to the individuals.

Some of the losses that can be experienced by the two parents going through a divorce are the loss of finance stability, loss of dreams, loss of trust, loss of belongings, and the loss of

the parent-child relationship. These losses or changes can be experienced before, during and after the divorce. When children are involved it can make the losses more ambiguous because there will always be a connection to the divorced spouse. This can cause an adult going through a divorce with children to continue to experience grief.

There are several losses that affect the children themselves and again there is usually more than one. These can include; loss of biological family, loss of financial stability, loss of belongings, loss of dreams, loss of emotional well-being, and loss of the parent-child relationship (Ahrons, 2004; Moxnes, 2003; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). These losses can continue to affect the child through life. The psychological distress they experience is similar to children who are grieving a parent's death (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). Ambiguous loss may freeze grief and prevent closure (Boss, 2012). It is important to be aware of the losses associated with divorce to ensure they are grieved and to prevent complicated grief.

When one reads about the losses experienced by children from divorce, it is important as a social worker to be aware of one's individual feelings, perceptions, and values toward divorce (Ahrons, 1980). Our ideas or values on divorce can affect the way we treat someone going through a divorce. A quantitative study was completed to see if an individual's marital status impacted their attitude towards how divorce affects children (Moon, 2011). The study concluded that the self-interests and personal experiences associated with marital status does influence individual's perceptions on how divorce affects children. Married parents and parents whose mothers and fathers were still married felt divorce impacted children more negatively than the parents who initiated their own divorce.

Individuals may feel that keeping the family together is the best option but a social worker should look at all options. Keeping the family together could be more detrimental than the divorce. The Study of Marital Instability Over the Life Course, looked at the well-being of adults who as a child experienced a parental divorce (Amato & Booth, 1991). To determine the well-being of the adult the quantitative study used Likert scales to measure the psychological, socioeconomic, social, and familial well-being of the adults. The study also looked at specific variables about the divorce. The evidence suggested that divorce causing minimal disruption for a child's life provides less long-term risks than staying in a marriage that the child preserves as un-happy (Amato & Booth, 1991; Burns & Dunlop, 2002). There can also be the risk of abuse in the marriage which could cause more long-term effects on the child as well.

Social workers also need to be aware of societies view on divorce. Ahrons (1979, 1980) completed a longitudinal study called, The Binuclear Family Research Project, on parents who were going through a divorce. Twenty years later Ahrons (2004) interviewed the adult children to find out, using the adult children's own words, how their parents' divorce affected them. Ahrons states that society uses the term, "adult child of divorce," to describe an individual whose parents divorced when they were a child. Yet there is no term for children whose parents do not divorce. These children are looked at as "normal" and anything else would be abnormal (Ahrons, 2004). This label can make parents and children from divorce feel that they cannot overcome the challenges of divorce and feel doomed (Ahrons, 2004). Societies view and the words used to describe divorce can cause even more grief on an already difficult situation.

Lastly, social workers want to be aware of how different cultural and religious views affect an individual experiencing a divorce. A study was completed to see how spirituality affected the psychological adjustment of adults after a divorce (Krumrei, Mahoney, &

Pargament, 2009). A sample of 55 women and 45 men, who filed for divorce within the last six months were used. The study concluded that when individuals viewed divorce as a sacred loss/desecration there were higher levels of depression. Yet the use of adaptive spiritual coping methods after a divorce showed higher levels of posttraumatic growth. Their cultural and religious views could cause added grief.

As you can see, children can be greatly affected by divorce, but yet they are the ones who do not have much say in the divorce process (Watson, 1981). The losses discussed can have a significant effect on a child but the loss of the parent-child relationship seems to be the most detrimental to a child. It can affect the child emotionally, behaviorally, and socially. You will see the theme of the importance of the parent-child relationship throughout. So how do we reduce the loss of the parent-child relationship? By looking further at the losses the children experience, how these losses affect the child and the importance of the parent-child relationship related to divorce, we will be able to learn how to alleviate the loss of the parent-child relationship.

Literature Review

Importance of Attachment

Infancy and early development. There is reason to believe that divorce can affect children's attachment or can cause an already attached child to lose that attachment. Attachment theory has proven the importance of a secure adult attachment for the growth and development of a child. Children who do not develop a secure attachment can have difficulties with regulating feelings, social difficulties, attention problems, and dissociative symptomatology (Siegel, 1999). The attachment relationship with a parent or adult figure is not only important for development

but also for emotional resilience (Siegel, 1999). Some studies have shown that children, whose parents divorced at a young age when developing attachment, have a high chance of developing insecure attachment compared to children whose parents are still together (Murray & Nair, 2005; Emery, Potter, Ocker, Rowen, Tonrello, & Xu, 2013). This inability to develop a secure attachment could be linked to a parent no longer being in the home.

School age and adolescent. It is seen in some studies that a secure attachment could be disrupted or lost after a parental divorce. In one study fathers felt their attachment stability was replaced by chaos in the father-child relationship (Kruk, 2010). If the divorce produces high conflict or violence, it can threaten the attachment the child has developed with the parent (Berline, Boris, & Zeanah, 2011). Using data drawn from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a further study was completed looking at the parent behavior in a nuclear family and how it affects adolescents (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2008). Using the data from the adolescents grades seven through twelfth it was confirmed that parenting of both mother and father each affects the child's self-esteem. There is a positive association of a parent's involvement and relationship with the child to the child's growth in self-esteem. It is apparent that the secure attachment to a parent and the continued parent-child relationship is needed for continued growth and development of a child. Because of this it is important to look at the affects of divorce on the parent-child relationship and continue to look at ways to alleviate this loss.

Parent-Child Relationship

The importance of attachment for child development was just discussed and loss of the parent-child relationship after divorce can cause a securely attached child to become insecure.

The custodial arrangement of a child after divorce could possibly influence the loss of the parent-child relationship. In one study it showed fathers are becoming disengaged when they are removed as the primary or co-caregivers and caused significant problems maintaining their relationships with their children (Kruk, 2010). The loss of the father child relationship is seen again in a longitudinal study which used the Parent Bonding Inventory (PBI) to look at the relationship of the parent and child during the divorce and then 10 years later (Burns & Dunlop, 1998). The researchers wanted to see if a change in the relationship with the parent after divorce affects future relationships. The data was collected from adolescents from divorced and non-divorced families. There were no differences found in the divorced and non-divorced adolescents and their adult relationships. The study did support the hypothesis that children whose parents divorced during their adolescents would describe their parents' parenting less favorably at the time of the divorce and later but only in the father relationship. This could be related to the fact that most of the children were in primary custody of their mother (Burns & Dunlop, 1998). The study did not have a clear understanding of the residential arrangement to confirm that it was a factor of the parent-child relationship loss.

Divorce has been shown to not only cause a loss in the father-child relationship but an overall feeling of parental loss. A qualitative study was completed in New Zealand looking at young adult's perceptions of how the divorce affected them (Cartwright, 2006). The young adults expressed the loss of contact with parents and having a difficult time relating to their parents (Cartwright, 2006; Moxnes, 2003; Berlin, Boris, & Zeanah, 2011; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). You see the loss of the parent-child relationship as well when the parents develop new relationships. Interview data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study looked at the co-parenting after parental dissolution among at-risk parents and showed that overall the co-

parenting decreased over time but they saw a stronger of more specific loss in the co-parenting when either parent developed a new relationship (Kamp Dush, Kotila, & Shoppe-Sullivan, 2011; Felder, Pfeiffer, Preuss, & Struss, 2001; Ahrons, 2004). This loss of a parental relationship can continue into adulthood as well (Kennedy & McCormick, 2000).

Some children not only express the loss of a parent-child relationship but also the loss of their sense of family (Cartwright, 2006). In Ahrons (2004) study she found that adult children whose parents divorced did not want their parents back together but wanted to continue the sense of family. The adult children still wanted to share special occasions, joys, and sorrows with both their parents. This sense of family can be difficult to continue if there is conflict from the divorce and if the involvement of a parent is lost.

Financial Stability and Belongings

A divorce can cause significant financial concerns and several children experience the loss of financial stability, belongings, and homes. In a qualitative study, they analyzed children's stories after going through a parental divorce (Moxnes, 2003). Children who experienced a loss in income showed more negative effects from the divorce (Moxnes, 2003; Aseltine, 1996; Ahrons, 2004). You see the concerns with the loss in financial stability further in the effects of divorce section.

In relation to financial stability there is also the loss of belongings or the loss of home. Since divorce is financially taxing there may need to be moves to different homes. This was seen as a loss to the children and children who changed residence showed more signs of negative development and signs of positive development less often than those who continued to live in their predivorce home (Moxnes, 2003; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). The children were not only

losing their home but they were also losing their friends and sense of community from the neighborhood (Moxnes, 2003).

Trust and Relationships

The idea of the loss in trust has also been seen in some of the literature. This is the loss in trust of the parent and others after experiencing a parental divorce (Cartwright, 2006). When Ahrons interviewed adult children about the affects of their parent's divorce, she saw the theme of the lack of trust in the children around commitment (Ahrons, 2004). Ahrons reviewed research about this and there is conflicting findings. One study even showed there is no difference in the trust level of children from divorced and non-divorced families. Ahrons concluded that early relationships with parents and early romantic relationships are more influential factors than the divorce (Ahrons, 2004; Siegel, 1999). This research shows the importance of the attachment with the parent and the continued parent-child relationship after the divorce to keep the feeling of "trust" or stability.

Increase in Behavior Concerns

Earlier when discussing attachment, it was stated that the child's attachment to the parent assists the child in developing regulation of their feelings (Siegel, 1999). Some evidence shows divorce can cause an increase of behavior which could be an effect of the loss of the parent-child relationship or lack of attachment. In a study looking at the data from the Maternal and Child Supplement of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the researchers wanted to see if there was an association between family structure changes and children's behavior problems (Claessens & Ryan, 2012). The study looked at four different developmental periods and collected data on family structure, child behavior problems, child age, and maternal

characteristics that could influence family structure stability. The study concluded that early family structure changes predicted children's behavior problems more than changes later in life.

Furthermore, an increase in negative behavior is seen by reviewed literature written in the past 11 years about the affects of divorce on adolescents (Hartman, Magalhaes, & Mandich, 2011). From the articles seven themes were seen; one was an increase in deviant behavior such as, alcohol, drug, and cigarette use seen in adolescents after experiencing a parental divorce or separation (Hartman, Magalhaes, & Mandich, 2011; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). In another study looking at the change in the structure of a household showed there is a significant increase in behavior problems from a two-biological parent household into a single-parent household (Claessens & Ryan, 2012). With the increase in behaviors you also see the loss of the emotional well-being of the child.

Emotional Well-Being

There is evidence of a decline in the psychosocial well-being of the child after a parental divorce. There can be increased anxiety, depression, anger, internalizing disorders, externalizing disorders, decreased self-esteem and an increase in suicide (Hartman, Magalhaes, & Mandich, 2011; Cartwright, 2006; Moum, Roysamb, Storksen, & Tambs, 2005; Moxnes, 2003; Aseltine, 1996; Kennedy & McCormick, 2000; Burns & Dunlop, 2002; Ahrons, 2004). In one study an adolescent described being "too emotional" when describing the effects on their well being (Cartwright, 2006). The lack of the parental involvement physically and the lack of a quality relationship can lower self-esteem (Bulanda & Debarun, 2008). You can also see lower self-esteem from the income loss (Moxnes, 2003). The child does not feel financially stable and their lifestyle may change which can cause a decline in their self-esteem.

An increase in depression has been noted when comparing an adolescent from a divorced and non-divorced family. A cross-sectional study was completed using data from a study of high school students in a metropolitan area of Boston (Aseltine, 1996). The study compared students whose parents separated or divorced to students whose families were intact. The study showed a weak association between divorce and adolescent depression but students living with a single parent following the divorce are significantly more depressed than students in intact and remarried families.

You can see the emotional well-being concerns continuing into adulthood. The Study of Marital Instability Over the Life Course cited earlier looked at the well-being of adults who experienced a parental divorce as a child (Amato & Booth, 1991). The study concluded that the respondents who experienced a parental divorce as a child exhibited lower levels of well-being as adults, compared to respondents who did not experience a parental divorce. The difference was small, but the study noted that when looking at the length of time from the childhood divorce and the age in adulthood, any differences are of interest (Amato & Booth, 1991). Again a common theme seen is the lack of the parent-child relationship and family structure causing significant affects on a child's well-being.

Decline in Academics

With the increase in a child's negative behaviors and the decline in their emotional well-being, seeing a decline in their academics is no surprise. How is a child able to sit in class and learn when these stressors are weighing on them? In a quantitative study they looked at data from a Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth and how the family status can affect school engagement (Costigan, Hou, Kampen, Schimmele, & Wu, 2010). It was

confirmed that marital disruption strongly negatively affected the children's school engagement and perceived achievement. The perceived achievement could also tie into the loss of self-esteem discussed earlier.

In a study looking at different post divorced family structures, all adolescents that experienced parental divorce had an increased risk of poorer grades compared to adolescents living with both their non-divorced biological parents (Breivik & Olweus, 2006; Hartman, Maglhaes, & Mandich, 2011; Jeynes, 2002; McLanahan, Sandefur, & Wojtkiewicz, 1992). Another study was completed to see if parental involvement reduced the decline of academics after divorce by looking at data from the National Education Longitudinal Survey. The study concluded that even when considering parental involvement the children who experienced divorce had a higher academic disadvantage (Jeynes, 2002).

The effect on academics is seen even further by looking at the correlation between the high school graduation rate and family structure. The study concluded that children who are 14 years old and living with a single parent or a parent and stepparent have a lower graduating rate than children who reside with both biological parents (McLanahan, Sandefu, & Wojtkiewicz, 1992). In a longitudinal Norwegian study researchers saw more of an academic decline in boys than girls after a parental divorce (Storksen, Roysamb, Moum, & Tambs, 2005). It is apparent that divorce affects children's academics and the effects in the lack of education could carry into their future adult careers. It is important to look at ways to reduce these losses and break the cycle of effects they can cause.

Custodial Arrangements

After reviewing the literature you can see a correlation between the importance of the parent-child relationship and a child's well-being. This brings up the question; does the custodial arrangement after divorce affect the parent-child relationship? There have been changes to custodial arrangements over the years. In previous years it was primarily the mother who received full custody of a child with visitation to the father. There has been an increase in joint custody arrangements and several studies have been conducted to determine if joint custody is the beneficial arrangement for a child. In one study the researcher looked at the father's perspective about the best custodial arrangement; noncustodial, sole, or joint (Kruk, 2010). Out of the 82 fathers, 69 felt equal or shared parenting was the best post-divorce arrangement to preserving the father-child relationship. You also see this in a longitudinal investigation of 98 families after divorce looking at the father involvement (Bowman & Ahrons, 1985; Watson, 1981; Matthijs, Sodermans, Swicegood, & Vanassche, 2013). All three indicators of parental involvement: contact, parental involvement scale, and parental interaction scale, showed joint custody fathers to be significantly more involved.

Another study which used data from a large Norwegian study, wanted the child's perspective of joint custody with some input from the parents (Haugen, 2010). The study conducted both a survey and in-depth interview with post-divorce families. The sample consisted of 473 parents and 910 children who experienced a divorce. Out of this sample 15 of the children were part of a joint custody arrangement. Interviews with the children and supplemental interviews with the parents were the main source of the findings. The study concluded that the children felt joint custody can be a positive and a negative experience (Haugen, 2010; Matthijs, Sodermans, Swicegood, & Vanassche, 2013). This depended on if the

joint custody was set up to benefit the child and not for the parent's benefit, the child had a say in the arrangement, and it was a low conflict divorce. A similar study compared joint custody to other custodial arrangements and how they affected the well-being of the child (Matthijs, Sodermans, Swicegood, & Vanassche, 2013). It was concluded that the wellbeing of the child is similar in all custodial arrangements but under certain circumstances joint custody can affect a child's well-being negatively. This was seen in high conflict divorces, presence of a new partner, and the quality of the parent-child relationship before the divorce.

Researchers looked at the well-being of the child further in a Scandinavian study which studied adolescent adjustments in four post-divorce family structures, single mother, stepfather, joint physical custody, and single father families (Breivik & Olweus, 2006). They compared different post-divorce custody arrangements and used data from a large-scale cohort-longitudinal intervention project. The study looked at the children's behavior related to their custody arrangement and compared it to the behavior of children whose parents were not divorced. It was concluded that adolescents from single father families had significantly higher externalizing problems than the combined mean of the other custodial arrangements. Adolescents from the non-divorce families and the joint physical custody families had less internalizing problems than from the single family households (Breivik & Olweus, 2006). This study saw a positive impact on a child well-being when they are in non-divorced or joint custody arrangements after divorce.

Another study discussed the concerns of the custodial arrangement related to attachment. This study took data from the longitudinal investigation of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study and administered a q-set to 2,268 mothers. They completed q-sort to measure attachment at age 3 and parents' reports on child's well-being. The q-sort was completed again to measure the toddler set and also interviewed mothers about the father child overnight stays.

Child adjustment was derived from the Child Behavior Checklist and likert scale for coparenting. It was concluded that frequent overnights away from the primary attachment figure is associated with greater attachment insecurity with infants (Emery, Ocker, Potter, Rowen, Tonrello, & Xu, 2013; Murray & Nair, 2005). More frequent overnights among toddlers but not infants predicted more positive behavior at age five (Emery, Ocker, Potter, Rowen, Tonrello, & Xu, 2013).

The importance of the parent-child relationship for a child's stability after divorce is seen throughout the literature review. This was also seen in a study completing a broad scoping review of adolescent and parental divorce or marital separation. The parent-child relationship definitely changed and it either alleviated the effects of the divorce acting as a buffer or it potentially increased these effects (Hartman, Maglahes, & Mandich, 2011; Aseltine, 1996; Ahrons, 1980; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). A continued positive parent-child relationship after a divorce strengthens the child and has been seen to reduce the affects of depression but a loss in the relationship is very damaging to the child (Aseltine, 1996; Moxnes, 2003; Amato & Booth, 1991). With the increase in joint custody, could this have a change on the loss of the parent-child relationship?

When reviewing the literature regarding custody arrangements, there does not seem to be one arrangement that is more beneficial than the other. Different arrangements seem to work better in different situations. Factors such as the age of the child during the divorce, the conflict from the divorce, and the relationship of the parent and child before the divorce can be factors in determining the custodial arrangement. One factor that is confirmed is the importance of maintaining the parent-child relationship after a divorce for a child's continued well-being and to assist in alleviating the losses from the divorce. If a child was in a joint custody arrangement would this help maintain that relationship? The overall question that is presented is: Does the

custodial arrangement alleviate or exacerbate the loss of the parent-child relationship after a parental divorce?

Conceptual Framework

Attachment Theory

This study seeks to look at the custodial arrangement after divorce and its effects on the parent-child relationship through the lens of attachment theory. The ability for a child to attach to a parental figure is crucial for their survival, development, regulation of their feelings, and future relationships. Attachment was first developed by John Bowlby, where he determined that a parent is used as a secure base to regulate infant safety in their environment (Main, 2000; Siegel, 1999). The sense of a secure base gives the child freedom to feel safe exploring their environment for continued development and even survival. Using attachment theory as a guide to show the importance of the parent-child relationship will frame the optimal custodial arrangement demonstrated in this research to ensure the relationship stays secure.

Attachment security is developed and learned by the child through interactions with their parents called reflective function or attunement. Attunement is when the state of mind of the attachment figure aligns with the child's state of mind and affect is communicated with facial expression, vocalizations, body gestures, and eye contact (Siegel, 1991). The child is able to express their needs, the attachment figure responds to these needs and a secure base through reciprocity is developed. Without the development of a secure base or attachment, a child may not develop the mental functioning needed for memory, narrative, emotion, representations, and states of mind (Siegel, 1999). This lack of development will hinder their future relationships and can continue the pattern of an insecure attachment. This brings important attention to divorce

that occurs during early development when a child is developing attachment. If a child experiences a parental divorce during early development, they could lose their attachment figure and not develop a secure attachment (Murray & Nair, 2005; Emery, Potter, Ocker, Rowen, Tonrello, & Xu, 2013). In conducting research on the age of the child, their custodial arrangement after divorce, and their current relationship with their parental figure, a better understanding of the influence of these factors will be gained.

Attachment theory not only looks at the early development of the child but how continued interactions and experiences affect future relationship development. Children who are school age or adolescent, if there are significant changes in a child's life, there is the possibility that a child's secure attachment might change. Insecurely attached children can become securely attached with a change in behavior, which means that some children who were secure during infancy can be at risk of later insecurity (Main, 2000; Siegel, 1999). One way this occurs to children during and past the developmental stage is a traumatic experience. A traumatic experience causes hyperarousal (fight or flight) or dissociation (freeze or surrender). The more a child is in one of these states after trauma the more likely they will have neuropsychiatric symptoms (Baker, Blakley, Perry, Pollard, & Vigilante, 1995). The availability of a parent or caretaker to provide support after a traumatic event determines the intensity and duration of the child's response to the trauma (Baker, Blakley, Perry, Pollard, & Vigilante, 1995). There can be multiple losses experienced by children from divorced families and this could be considered traumatic. If these losses are not resolved there is the possibility of developing a disorganized attachment or with older children cause insecurity, which can affect future emotional experiences (Siegel, 1999).

The experience during the divorce, such as possible abuse, could also cause a securely attached child to become insecure (Berline, Boris, & Zeanah, 2011). Attachment theory shows the importance of the continued parent-child relationship since attachment security is not fixed or fully determined in infancy. By looking at the custodial arrangement after divorce through this research and the adult child's current relationship with their parental figure, insight can be gained on how this affects the continued parent-child relationship.

Methods

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to examine if the custodial arrangement alleviates or exacerbates the loss of the parent-child relationship after a parental divorce. A survey, entitled *Custodial Arrangement and the Parent-Child Relationship Survey* (see Appendix A), was used as an instrument to compare children with different custodial arrangements after a parental divorce, to determine if the different custodial arrangement affects their sense of parental loss. The survey is composed of two sections. The first section asks the respondent to give demographic information, such as their current age, gender, age when parents divorced, custodial arrangement after the divorce and if they attended therapy or a support group before or after the divorce. The second section is composed of the Parent-Child Relationship Survey (PCRS). The PCRS is a 24-item instrument used to measure adults' perceptions of their parent-child relationship (Fischer, 2007). The design of this study is a nonprobability quantitative survey.

Sample

The sample used for this study were adult children of divorce who had to be 19 years or older and who experienced a parental divorce when they were 18 years old or younger. Using a

nonprobability snowball sampling method, adult children of divorce were the target population to gather the child's perspective of how the custodial arrangement affects the parent-child relationship. As adults it is their choice to complete the survey and does not require parental permission or signed consent forms.

The researcher created an electronic version of the *Custodial Arrangement and the Parent-Child Relationship Survey* using Qualtrics, which is a web based survey software. The researcher created an event page on Facebook, which is a social networking website, inviting adult friends who experienced a parental divorce when they were 18 years old or younger to take the survey. The researcher requested that the respondents share the link with other adult friends whom they know also experienced a parental divorce as a child. Excluded from the sample were individuals who are 18 or younger, individuals who did not experience a parental divorce, and individuals who experienced a parental divorce after the age of 18. The survey completed by the respondents included demographic information and the PCRS. The responses were gathered and analyzed to determine if the custodial arrangement after a parental divorce alleviates or exacerbates the loss of the parent-child relationship.

Protection of Human Subjects

Participation in the study was explained in detail on the Facebook event page, by presenting the consent form (Appendix) before the respondents completed the survey. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. The link on the Facebook event page directed the respondent to the Qualtrics survey, which then took the respondent to a different website. There was no link attaching the findings of the survey to the respondent. Respondents were able to take the survey at their leisure and when it was convenient for them.

A parental divorce can be a difficult situation and as stated before can be seen as an ambiguous loss. Taking the survey could have brought up past grief experienced from the losses during the divorce. Primarily it could bring up grief over the loss of the parent-child relationship. Before the respondent took the survey they read a consent form describing the study. By completing the survey, the respondent agreed that the study is confidential. The respondent could choose not to take the survey and could stop at any time during the process. Further, the consent form gave information for psychological support if issues arose from taking the survey.

Measures

The data collection instrument that was used for this study is a quantitative survey entitled, *Custodial Arrangement and the Parent-Child Relationship Survey*. The survey included five demographic questions and the Parent-Child Relationship Survey (PCRS).

The first section of the survey asked demographic information of the respondents. The demographic variables included, gender, current age, age when parents divorced, the custodial arrangement after their parents divorced, and if they received therapy or attended support groups before or after the divorce. The demographic information was gathered by the researcher through a quantitative survey entitled, *Custodial Arrangement and the Parent-Child Relationship Survey*.

The second section of the survey was composed of the Parent-Child Relationship Survey (PCRS). The PCRS is a 24-item instrument used to measure the quality of the parent-child relationship through the lens of an adult child. The instrument was originally developed to assess the effects of divorce on adult children of divorce (Fischer, 2007). The PCRS comes in

two forms, one for assessing the father-child relationship and the other to assess the mother-child relationship. These forms are identical except for the words “father” and “mother,” which are interchangeable (Fischer, 2007).

The PCRS scores for father and mother are calculated differently. The father version factors include; positive affect, father involvement, communication, and anger. The PCRS mother version factors include; positive affect, resentment/role confusion, identification, and communication. The respondents rated their responses on a seven-point scale. The scale score was developed by summing the means of the factors. The PCRS has excellent internal consistency, with alphas for the father subscales ranging from .89 to .94 with an overall alpha of .96 and alphas for the mother subscales ranging from .61 to .94 with an overall alpha of .94. The scale gives an accurate relationship score and shows a definite difference in scores when comparing children from divorced families, to children from non-divorced families (Fischer, 2007).

Data Analysis

After the Institutional Review Board approved the research plan, the *Custodial Arrangement and the Parent-Child Relationship Survey* was distributed to the researcher’s friends through an event on Facebook. Using a snowball technique the researcher requested respondents to share this event with other friends who meet the criteria as respondents. The survey was completed by the respondents through Qualtrics and the data was analyzed by the researcher using the statistical analysis program called SPSS.

The PCRS was scored by first reverse-scoring negatively worded items 9, 13, and 14. Then the subscale mean scores were determined for the father version by summing 28 items and

mother 26 items and dividing by that many items to find the means. The total score is the sum of the means of the subscales (Fischer, 2007).

Descriptive Statistic. The first descriptive variable that was addressed is the gender of the respondents (Gender). This nominal variable is described in the survey as “What is your gender?” The response options are: Male (0); Female (1) (Gender). The research question to this study is: how many respondents are male and how many are female? This nominal variable was measured descriptively using a frequency distribution table.

The second descriptive variable that was addressed is the legal custodial arrangement after parents’ divorced. This nominal variable is described in the survey as “What was your legal custodial arrangement after your parents’ divorced (chose one):” The response options are: Sole custody with mother and visitation with father (1); Sole custody with father and visitation with mother (2); Joint custody with equal shared time between mother and father (3); Sole custody with mother and no visitation with father (4); Sole custody with father and no visitation with mother (5); Other (ex. raised by other family members or different visitation arrangements) (6) (Custodial Arrangement). The research question to this study is: what was the legal custodial arrangement of the respondents after their parent’s divorce? This nominal variable was measured descriptively using a frequency distribution and displayed in a pie chart.

Differences. A One-Way ANOVA Test was completed to compare the independent nominal-variable the custodial arrangement, as operationally defined above (Custodial arrangement) and the means of the dependent variable total scale score for the PCRS for mother (TotalMom) and completed again for father (TotalDad). The PCRS measures the quality of the parent-child relationship and is interchangeable for mother and father. The dependent variable

PCRS scale score is determined from completing the PCRS. Once it is determined significant differences exist between the custodial arrangements and their PCRS means scale scores for mother and father a Tukey Post Hoc Test was completed determine which custodial arrangements show significant differences between their mean PCRS scale score. The research question is: is there a statistical difference between a respondent in one custodial arrangement compared to a respondent in another custodial arrangement and their PCRS score for their mother and father? The hypothesis is: there is a statistically significant difference between the respondent's custodial arrangement after their parental divorce and their parent-child relationship scores for their mother and father. The null hypotheses is: there is not a statistically significant difference between the respondent's custodial arrangement and their parent-child relationship score for their mother and father.

To look further at the differences in the mean PCRS scale scores and respondents with different custodial arrangements, two T-tests were completed. All respondents had legal visitation with their fathers except for the respondents who had the legal custodial arrangement of sole custody with mother and no visitation with father (4). It is unknown if there is father involvement in the arrangement, other (6). The independent nominal variable describing the custodial arrangement was recoded by combining: Sole custody with mother and visitation with father, sole custody with father and visitation with mother, and joint custody with equal shared time between mother and father (1) and sole custody with mother and no visitation with father (2) (Custodial Arrangement_R). Not included was sole custody with father and no visitation with mother (5) because there were no respondents and other (6) because it is unknown if there was father involvement. The dependent variable is the mean of the PCRS scale score for mother and father determined from completing the PCRS for both parents. The research question is: is there

a statistical difference between a respondent in a custodial arrangement with father involvement compared to a respondent in a custodial arrangement with no father involvement and their total parent-child relationship scale score for mother and father? The hypothesis is: there is a statistically significant difference between the respondents with custodial arrangements with father involvement compared to respondents with a custodial arrangement with no father involvement and their PCRS scale scores for their mother and father. The null hypotheses is: there is not a statistically significant difference between the respondents with custodial arrangements with father involvement compared to respondents with a custodial arrangement with not father involvement and their PCRS scale scores for their mother and father.

Strengths and Limitations

There were strengths and limitations to this study which could affect the outcome of the data. A survey was used as the instrument to gather the data. Survey research gives the ability to gather more data inexpensively and quickly. The respondents were able to complete the survey when it was convenient for them, which allowed respondents as much time needed to answer the questions. The survey was anonymous and respondents were more likely to answer more honestly to a survey compared to face to face questions. There were no limitations on sex, race, culture, income, education, or geographic location. This allowed for a diverse sample but was not the main focus of the study.

The limitations to this survey were the nonprobability sample, how the survey was accessed, and other factors that affect divorce that were not included in the survey. The sampling was not random, the respondents that were picked are individuals that the researcher knows experienced a parental divorce as a child and who are an adult. Excluded from the sample

were individuals who did not experience a parental divorce and who were 18 years old or younger. The survey was completed through Facebook, which excluded individuals who do not utilize or have access to the social networking site. This did not give the researcher the ability to check for biases. Since the survey was optional and was completed at the respondent's leisure, this could have created a lower sample size than anticipated by the researcher.

This survey was limited to only looking at the custodial arrangement, age, gender, and PCRS scale score after the divorce. Other factors that may affect this relationship, which were not included in the survey are, abuse, financial instability, the quality of the relationship between the parents themselves, the age of the child at the divorce, if the child had developed a secure attachment before the divorce, what was the cause of the divorce, the personality of the parent or their own attachment style, if the parent followed the legal custodial arrangement, race, and religion. Specifically when looking at race and religion, different ethnicities and religious groups may have different views on divorce and custodial arrangement after divorce. This could cause respondents to have negative feelings towards their parents if divorce is viewed negatively in their ethnic or religious group. Also, what was the relationship between the parent and the respondent before the divorce occurred? The respondent may have already had a low PCRS scale score before the divorce. Lastly, the respondents are answering these questions about the past. The way the respondents view the past divorce now could be different than when they were going through the divorce. It would be interesting to see what the PCRS scale score was right after the divorce and what it would be years later. These factors all put limitations on the research but from reviewing the literature the custodial arrangement is still a factor that needs more research.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

There were a total of 74 respondents who completed the survey. The age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 74 with most of the respondents falling in the range of 21 to 38 and the average age being 30. The first descriptive statistic was developed to answer the question: How many respondents are male and how many are female? A frequency distribution shown in Table 1 reflects the gender of respondents.

Table 1

Gender of Respondents

Gender of Respondents		
Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	9	12.2
Female	65	87.8
Total:	74	100.0

The findings of this study in Table 1 show that nine respondents (12.2%) are male and 65 respondents (87.8%) are female. It again shows there were 74 total respondents.

The second descriptive statistic was developed to answer the question: What was your legal custodial arrangement after your parents divorced? A frequency distribution shown in Table 2 reflects the custodial arrangement of respondents after their parental divorce.

Table 2

Legal Custodial Arrangement after Parental Divorce

Legal Custodial Arrangement after Parental Divorce		
Custodial Arrangement	Number of Respondents	Percent
Sole Mom (Dad visitation)	42	56.8
Sole Dad (Mom visitation)	5	6.8
Joint Custody	19	25.7
Sole Mom (no Dad visitation)	6	8.1
Other	2	2.7
Total:	74	100.0

The findings of this study in Table 2 show the custodial arrangement of the respondents after their parents divorced. Of the respondents 42 (56.8%) had mother as the sole custodian with father visitation, 5 (6.8%) had father as the sole custodian with mother visitation, 19 (25.7%) had joint custody with mother and father, 6 (8.1%) had mother as sole custodian and no visitation with father, and 2 (2.7%) had a custodial arrangement that was different than the options given. There were no respondents who had sole custody with father and no visitation with mother. The data is further detailed in Figure 1.

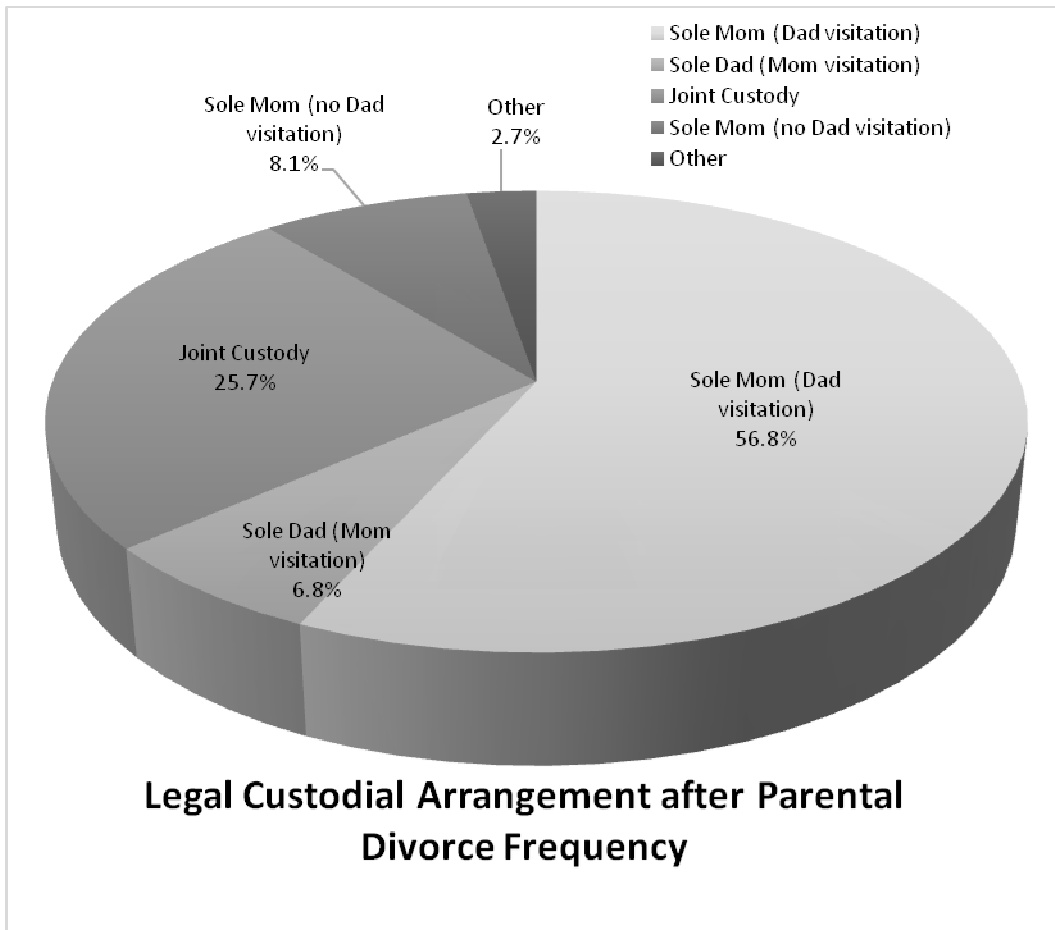


Figure 1. Legal Custodial Arrangement after Parental Divorce Frequency

The pie graph in Figure 1 shows that the largest percentage of respondents (56.8%) had a custodial arrangement of sole custody with mother and visitation with father and the smallest percentage (2.7%) had a different arrangement that was not an option. The second largest percent (25.7%) had joint custody with mother and father. There was almost an equal amount of respondents who had sole custody with father and visitation with mother (6.8%) and sole custody with mother with no visitation with their father (8.1%). There were no respondents who had the arrangement of sole father custody and no visitation with mother (5).

Inferential Statistics

Statistical differences using ANOVA. To determine statistical difference a One-Way ANOVA Tukey Post Hoc Test was used to answer the question: is there a difference between a respondent in one custodial arrangement compared to a respondent in another custodial arrangement and their PCRS scale score for their mother and father? The results are shown in Table 3 and Figure 2.

Table 3

Comparing Custodial Arrangement and the Parent-Child Relationship Score

Comparing Custodial Arrangement and the PCRS			
Custodial Arrangement	Number of Respondents	Mean Score Mom	Mean Score Dad*
Sole Mom (Dad visitation)	42	20.15	15.67
Sole Dad (Mom visitation)	5	19.47	13.25
Joint Custody	19	19.15	18.72*
Sole Mom (No Dad visitation)	6	20.86	9.39*
Other	2	24.32	19.67
Total:	74	20.02	15.89

*Means difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 3 shows the results of the One-Way ANOVA Tukey Post Hoc Test comparing the different custodial arrangements; sole custody with mother and visitation with father (1), sole

custody with father and visitation with mother (2), joint custody with equal shared time between mother and father (3), sole custody with mother and no father visitation (4), and other (ex. raised by other family members or different visitation arrangement) (6) to their mean PCRS scale score for their mother and father. First, looking at the comparison of the respondents and their PCRS mean scale score for mother, which range from 24.32 to 19.15. Respondents who had the legal custodial arrangement after a parental divorce of sole custody with mother and visitation with father (1) had a mean PCRS score for mother of 20.15. Respondents with the custodial arrangement of sole custody with father and visitation with mother (2) had a mean PCRS score for mother of 19.47. Respondents with joint custody with equal shared time between mother and father (3) had a mean PCRS score for mother of 19.15. Respondents with the custodial arrangement of sole custody with mother and no father visitation (4) had a mean PCRS score for mother of 20.86. Respondents with the custodial arrangement of other (6) had a mean PCRS score for mother of 24.32. The p-value is .781 which is greater than .05. This determines there is no significant difference between a respondent in one legal custodial arrangement to a respondent with a different legal custodial arrangement and their mean PCRS scale score for mother. Since there is not a statistical difference we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is not a difference between the respondent's custodial arrangement and their parent-child relationship score for their mother.

Next when looking at the comparison of the respondents and their PCRS mean scale score for father, respondents who had the legal custodial arrangement after a parental divorce of sole custody with mother and visitation with father (1) had a mean PCRS score for father of 15.67. Respondents with the custodial arrangement of sole custody with father and visitation with mother (2) had a mean PCRS score for father of 13.25. Respondents with joint custody

with equal shared time between mother and father (3) had a mean PCRS score for father of 18.72. Respondents with the custodial arrangement of sole custody with mother and no father visitation (4) had a mean PCRS score for father of 9.39. Respondents with the custodial arrangement of other (6) had a mean PCRS score for father of 19.67. The One-Way ANOVA p-value is .024 which is less than .05. This determines there is a statistically significant difference between a respondent in one legal custodial arrangement to a respondent with a different legal custodial arrangement and their mean PCRS scale score for father. After completing the Tukey Post Hoc Test it is determined that respondents who have a custodial arrangement of joint custody (3) and sole custody with mother and no visitation with father (4) had the most statistically significant difference. It was determined when comparing their mean PCRS scale score for father that the p-value is .018 which is less than .05. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is not a difference between the respondent's custodial arrangement and their parent-child relationship scale score for their father. There was not a statistically significant difference between the other custodial arrangements and their mean PCRS scale score for father. If we were just looking at those custodial arrangements then we would not reject the null hypothesis that there is not a difference between the respondent's custodial arrangement and their parent-child relationship scale score for their father. The data for the comparison of the respondent's custodial arrangement and their mean PCRS scale score for father are detailed further below in Figure 2.

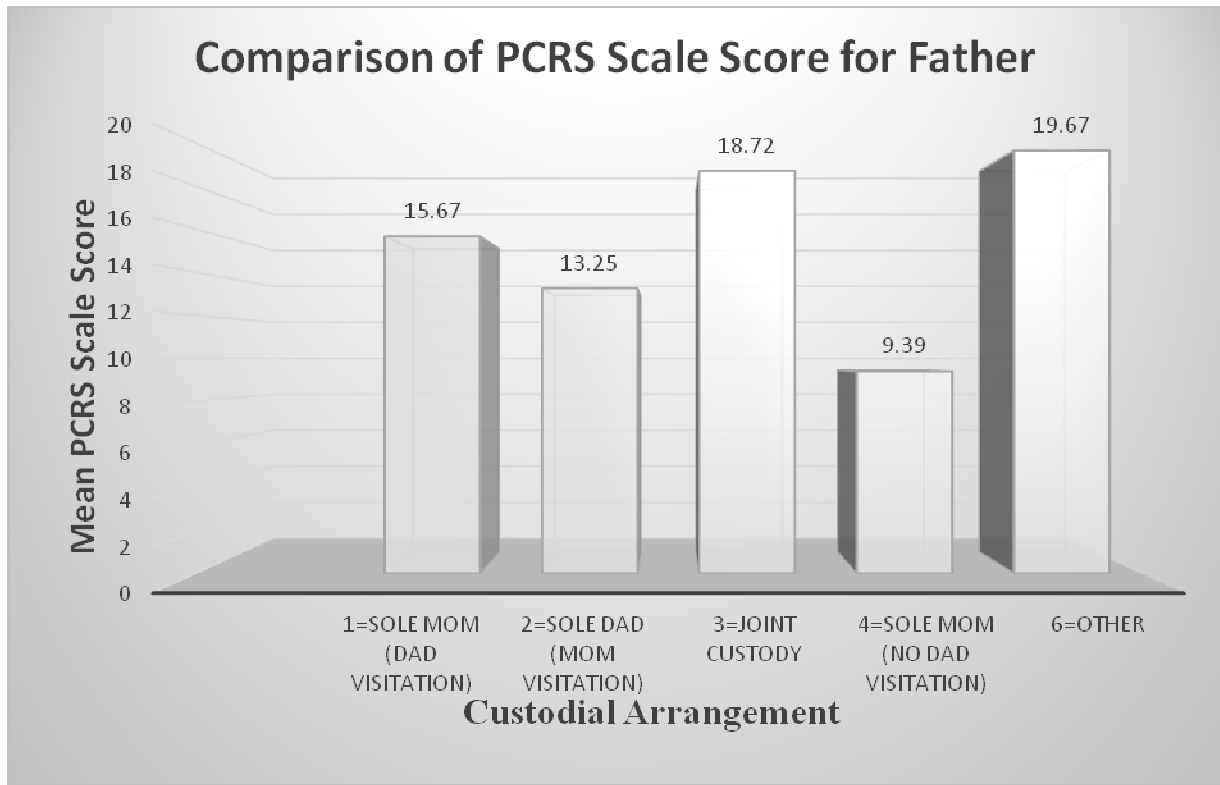


Figure 2. Comparison of Mean Scores for the Father PCRS

The bar graph in Figure 2 shows further that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean PCRS scale score for respondents with the custodial arrangement of joint custody (18.72) and sole custody with mother and no visitation with father (9.39). You can also see that there is not a statistically significant difference between the other custodial arrangements and their mean PCRS scale score for father. This further shows that respondents with a custodial arrangement of sole custody with mother and no visitation with father have the lowest mean PCRS scale score for fathers (9.39). Respondents who had a custodial arrangement of other had the highest score at 19.67 but they also had the least amount of respondents at 2. The second highest score were respondents who had joint custody with mother and father with a PCRS scale score for father of 18.72.

Statistical differences using t-test. To look further at statistical difference two t-tests were completed to answer the: is there a statistical difference between a respondent in a custodial arrangement with father involvement compared to a respondent in a custodial arrangement with no father involvement and their total parent-child relationship scale score for mother and father? Custodial arrangement was recoded combining custodial arrangements with father involvement; sole custody mother and visitation with father, sole custody father and visitation with mother, and joint custody with equal time between mother and father (1) and comparing it to the custodial arrangement with no father involvement, sole custody mother and no visitation with father (2) and to see if there is a difference in their mean PCRS scale score for mother and father. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Comparing Custodial Arrangements with and without Father Involvement and their PCRS

Comparison of Father Involvement and PCRS			
Custodial Arrangement	Number of Respondents	Mean Score Mom	Mean Score Dad*
Father Involved	66	19.81	16.37
No Father Involved	6	20.86	9.39
Total:	72	40.67	25.76
*p-value<.05			

Table 4 shows the results of the t-test comparing the mean PCRS scale score for mother and father of respondents who have a custodial arrangement after a parental divorce that had father involvement to respondents who had a custodial arrangement who did not have father

involvement. Starting with the PCRS scale score for mother, the respondents who had a custodial arrangement with father involvement (1) had a mean PCRS scale score for mother of 19.81. Respondents who had a custodial arrangement with no father involvement (2) had a mean PCRS scale score for mother of 20.86. The difference between these mean scale scores was negative 1.05 points. Therefore respondents who had a custodial arrangement with no father involvement had a higher quality relationship with their mother. The Levene's Test of Equality of Variance for the independent samples t-test is .312. Since .312 is greater than .05, the Levene's Test is not significant. Therefore, the p-value for this t-test is .668. Since the p-value is greater than .05, the results of this data are not statistically significant. As a result, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is not a statistically significant difference between the respondents with custodial arrangements with father involvement compared to respondents with a custodial arrangement with not father involvement and their PCRS scale scores for their mother.

Next when looking at the PCRS scale score for father, the respondents who had a custodial arrangement with father involvement (1) had a mean PCRS scale score for father of 16.37. Respondents who had a custodial arrangement with no father involvement (2) had a mean PCRS scale score for father of 9.39. The difference between these mean scale scores was 6.97 points. Therefore respondents who had a custodial arrangement with father involvement had a higher quality relationship with their father. The Levene's Test of Equality of Variance for the independent samples t-test is .341. Since .341 is greater than .05, the Levene's Test is not significant. Therefore, the p-value for this t-test is .013. Since the p-value is less than .05, the results of this data are statistically significant. As a result, we reject the null hypothesis that there is not a statistically significant difference between the respondents with custodial

arrangements with father involvement compared to respondents with a custodial arrangement with not father involvement and their PCRS scale scores for their father. Therefore, the results of this study support the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference between the respondents with custodial arrangements with father involvement compared to respondents with a custodial arrangement with no father involvement and their PCRS scale scores for their father.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to look at the custodial arrangement after a parental divorce and determine if it affects the parent-child relationship. Divorce is an ambiguous loss and one of the losses a child can experience after a parental divorce is the loss of the parent-child relationship. With this in mind the overall research question was: Does the custodial arrangement alleviate or exacerbate the loss of the parent-child relationship after a parental divorce? To assist in answering this question a survey was created to collect demographic information of the respondents, which included their custodial arrangement after a parental divorce, and the completion of the Parent-Child Relationship Survey (PCRS) which measures the quality of parent-child relationships. The survey was completed by adults who were 19 years old or older and who experienced a parental divorce when they were 18 years old or younger.

The survey concluded that there was not a statistical difference in a respondent with one custodial arrangement compared to another respondent in a different arrangement and their PCRS scale score for mother. In fact the mean PCRS scale scores for mother were very similar in all custodial arrangements, 20.15, 19.17, 19.15, 20.86, and 24.32. These scores were also significantly higher in some arrangements than the mean PCRS scale scores for father, 15.67, 13.25, 18.72, 9.39, and 19.67. These findings would be appropriate when comparing it to the

literature, in the fact that there was limited literature showing loss of the mother-child relationship after a parental divorce. Studies did show the loss of contact with parents and having a difficult time relating to their parents (Cartwright, 2006; Moxnes, 2003; Berlin, Boris, & Zeanah, 2011; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). Another literature study did conclude that children whose parents divorced during their adolescents would describe their parents' parenting less favorably at the time of the divorce and later but only in the father relationship (Burns & Dunlop, 1998). The literature explained that this could be because most of the children remain in custodial arrangements with their mother. This literature information and the findings from the survey indicate that the quality of the relationship with the mother seems to remain more positive and there is less of a mother-child relationship loss.

The findings from the survey support the literature further when looking at respondents in different custodial arrangements and their PCRS scale score for father. There is a statistically significant difference in respondents who had joint custody compared to respondents with sole custody with mother and no visitation with father and their PCRS scale score for father. These findings are seen in the literature when one study showed fathers are becoming disengaged when they are removed as the primary or co-caregivers and caused significant problems maintaining their relationships with their children (Kruk, 2010). It went further stating that fathers felt their attachment stability was replaced by chaos in the father-child relationship (Kruk, 2010). This is indicated from the survey findings when comparing respondents in a custodial arrangement with father involvement compared to respondents in a custodial arrangement with not father involvement and their PCRS scale scores for father. It was concluded that there is a statistically significant difference in their mean scores for father. The survey supported the literature findings that there can be a loss or a lower quality parent-child relationship when

children are in a custodial arrangement where there is no father involvement or even reduced involvement.

Recommendations for Future Research

The literature proved that parental divorce can be a difficult event in a child's life. The losses connected with divorce and primarily the loss of the parent-child relationship can affect the child greatly. Further research needs to be done looking at all the factors that can affect the parent-child relationship after divorce instead of looking at just one and how they can affect each other. More longitudinal studies need to be completed starting before the divorce. Some children may have already had a loss or low quality parent-child relationship before the divorce. It would make sense then that they would still have a low quality parent-child relationship after the divorce. If the divorce was a positive outcome which stopped a lot of fighting and abuse maybe you could even see a positive change in the parent-child relationship after divorce. It would be interesting to see research completed before, during, and after a divorce. This would assist in seeing what factors affect the child the most.

Lastly more research needs to be completed looking further at respondent factors such as: race, religion, where they grew up, and gender. In this study 65 of the respondents were female and only nine were male. When looking at the mean scale score for the nine male respondents in this study it showed that their mean scale score for mother and father were about the same. When comparing this to the female respondents where some had very different scores for their mother and their father. No research that specifically looked at the gender of the respondents was identified.

As stated before in the limitations section, different ethnic and religious groups could have strong views on divorce. This could possibly affect a child's feelings towards their parent if there is a negative view on divorce and separating the family in a custodial arrangement. There are many complexities to the parent-child relationship yet it is important to study this relationship because of the known positive and negative effects it can have on a child and into adulthood.

Implications for Social Worker Practice

Divorce has rapidly increased over the years and has currently affected about 50 percent of the population in the United States. The literature reviewed described divorce as an ambiguous loss and the different effects divorce can have on children. The findings from this survey did conclude that the custodial arrangement can be a factor in the loss of the parent-child relationship after divorce. The literature review also showed that over all children expressed the loss of contact with parents and having a difficult time relating to their parents after a divorce (Cartwright, 2006; Moxnes, 2003; Berlin, Boris, & Zeanah, 2011; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). It is important for social workers to be aware of this information so they can give support to a child experiencing a divorce and can assist in alleviating these effects. These effects can include the loss of the parent-child relationship, decline in academics, increase in negative behaviors, and decline in emotional well-being. By understanding the difficulties, effects, and losses a social worker is able educate to the child and parents and support them in finding ways they can overcome these stressors.

It is important as a social worker to educate and support the parents because the parent-child relationship definitely is changed after divorce and the parent-child relationship either

alleviates the affects of the divorce acting as a buffer, or it potentially increases these effects (Hartman, Maglahes, & Mandich, 2011; Aseltine, 1996; Ahrons, 1980; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). By educating the parents on the effects of the parent-child relationship loss on children and providing information that custodial arrangements could contribute to the loss of the parent-child relationship, it may assist parents in deciding what custodial arrangement they chose after divorce.

Lastly this information shows how important it is for social workers to understand and utilize attachment theory. Attachment is crucial for children's survival, development, regulation of their feelings, and future relationships. A disruption or change of the attachment can greatly affect a child if there is no secure attachment. We social workers need to assist in preserving this attachment whenever possible and to ensure a child forms a secure attachment in order to reduce the affects of a traumatic event or change. Social workers also need to continue to view their clients with Person in the Environment (PIE) and understand that there are not just one but several factors that can influence a client's life. With all this in mind, as a social worker, we can be that helping hand and guide parents and children through a difficult life event and assist them in building their resilience for the future.

References

- Ahrons, C. (1980). Redefining the divorced family: A conceptual framework. *Social Work*, 25(6), 437-441. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=5e8d0a76-e0a5-4123-9abb-d0f5f2f215bb%40sessionmgr198&vid=6&hid=126>
- Ahrons, C. (2004). *We're still family: What grown children have to say about their parents' divorce*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.
- Ahrons, C., & Bowman, M. (1985). Impact of legal custody status on fathers' parenting postdivorce. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 47(2), 481-488. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=65920d77-c5a3-413e-b50a-f497b37f5de9%40sessionmgr112&vid=8&hid=125>
- Amato, P., & Booth, A. (1991). Consequences of parental divorce and marital unhappiness for Adult well-being. *Social Forces*, 69(3), 895-914.
- Aseltine, R. (1996). Pathways linking parental divorce with adolescent depression. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 37, 133-148. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=dcf0a545-6188-47e2-80a0-b4525e9678df%40sessionmgr115&vid=4&hid=125>
- Baker, W., Blakley, T., Perry, B., Pollard, R., & Vigilante, D. (1995). Childhood trauma, the

- neurobiology of adaptation, and “use-dependent” develop of the brain: How “state” become “traits”. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 16(4), 271-291.
- Berlin, L., Boris, N., & Zeanah, C. (2011). Practitioner review: Clinical application of attachment theory and research for infants and young children. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 52(8), 819-833. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2011.02399.x
- Boss, P. (2012). The origin of ambiguous loss: From 1973 to the present. *Disenfranchised Grief and Ambiguous Loss*, 38(4), 3-7.
- Brevik, K., & Olweus, D. (2006). Adolescent’s adjustment in four post-divorce family structures: Single mother, stepfather, joint physical custody and single father families. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 44(3/4), 99-124. doi:10.1300/j087v44n03_07
- Bulanda, R., & Majumdar, D. (2009). Perceived parent-child relations and adolescent self-esteem. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 18(2), 203-212.
doi:10.1007/s10826-008-9220-3
- Burns, A., & Dunlop, R. (1998). Parental divorce, parent-child relations, and early adult relationships: A longitudinal Australian study. *Personal Relationships*, 5, 393-407.
- Burns, A., & Dunlop, R. (2002). Parental marital quality and family conflict: Longitudinal effect on adolescents from divorcing and non-divorcing families. *Journal of Divorce &*

Remarriage, 37(1/2), 57-74. Retrieved from

[http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=](http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=3ded28a6-827f-4459-9bab-de98198f1a7e%40sessionmgr111&vid=5&hid=119)

[3ded28a6-827f-4459-9bab-de98198f1a7e%40sessionmgr111&vid=5&hid=119](http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=3ded28a6-827f-4459-9bab-de98198f1a7e%40sessionmgr111&vid=5&hid=119)

Cartwright, C. (2006). You want to know how it affected me? Young adults' perceptions of the

impact of parental divorce. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 44(3/4), 125-143.

doi:10.1300/j087v44n03_08

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013). *Marriage and Divorce*. Retrieved from

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/divorce.htm>

Claessens, A., & Ryan, R. (2012). Associations between family structure changes and children's

behavior problems: The moderating effects of timing and marital birth. *Developmental*

Psychology, 49(7), 1219-1231. doi:10.1037/a0029397

Costigan, C., Hou, F., Kampen, R., Schimmele, C., & Wu, Z. (2010). Change and stability in

cohabitation and children's educational adjustment. *Journal of Comparative Family*

Studies, 41(4), 537-579.

Divorce Statistics. (n.d.). *Divorce Statistics in America*. Retrieved from

<http://www.divorcestatistics.org>

Emery, R., Rowen, J., & Tornello, S. (2013). Overnight custody arrangements, attachment, and

adjustment among very young children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75, 871-885.

doi:10.1111/jomf.12045

Felder, W., Pfeiffer, C., Preuss, W., & Struss, M. (2001). Adolescents from divorced families and their perceptions of visitation arrangements and factors influencing parent-child contact. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 35(1/2), 75-89.

Fischer, J. (2007). *Measures for clinical practice and research: A sourcebook*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press.

Haugen, G. (2010). Children's perspectives on everyday experiences of shared residence: Time, emotions and agency dilemmas. *Children & Society*, 24, 112-122.

doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2008.00198.x

Hartman, L., Magalhaes, L., & Mandich, A. (2011). What does parental divorce or marital separation mean for adolescents? A scoping review of north American literature. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 52, 490-518. doi:10.1080/10502556.2011.609432

Hooyman, N., & Kramer, B. (2006). *Living through loss: Interventions across the life span*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Jeynes, W. (2002). Does the parental involvement eliminate the effects of parental divorce on the academic achievement of adolescents? *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 37(1/2),

101-115.

Kamp Dush, C., Kotila, L., & Schoppe-Sullivan, S. (2011). Predictors of supportive coparenting after relationship dissolution among at-risk parents. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25(3), 356-365. doi:10.1037/a0023652

Kennedy, J., & McCormick, C. (2000). Father-child separation, retrospective and current views of attachment relationship with father, and self-esteem in late adolescence. *Psychological Reports*, 86, 827-834. doi:10.2466/PR0.86.3.827-834

Kruk, E. (2010). Parental and social institutional responsibilities to children's needs in the divorce transition: Fathers' perspectives. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 18(2), 159-178. doi:10.3149/jms.1802.159

Krumrei, E., Mahoney, A., & Pargament, K. (2009). Divorce and the divine: The role of spirituality in adjustment to divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 373-383.

Matthijs, K., Sodermans, A., Swicegood, G., & Vanassche, S. (2013). Commuting between two parental households: The association between joint physical custody and adolescent wellbeing following divorce. *Journal of Family Studies*, 19(2), 139-158.

McLanahan, S., Sandefur, G., & Wojtkiewicz, R. (1992). The effects of parental marital status during adolescence on high school graduation. *Social Forces*, 71(1), 103-121.

- Moon, M. (2011). The effects of divorce on children: Married and divorced parents' perspectives. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 52, 344-349.
doi:10.1080/10502556.2011.585093
- Moum, T., Roysamb, E., Storksen, I., & Tambs, K. (2005). Adolescents with a childhood experience of parental divorce: A longitudinal study of mental health and adjustment. *Journal of Adolescence*, 28, 725-739. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2005.01.001
- Moxnes, K. (2003). Risk factors in divorce: Perceptions by the children involved. *Childhood*, 10(2), 131-146. doi:10.1177/0907568203010002002
- Murray, A., & Nair, H. (2005). Predictors of attachment security in preschool children from intact and divorced families. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 166(3), 245-263.
- Rogers, K. (2004). A theoretical review of risk and protective factors related to post-divorce adjustment in young children. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 40(3/4), 135-147.
doi:10.1300/j087v40n03_09
- Siegel, D. (1999). *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Watson, M. (1981). Custody alternatives: Defining the best interests of the children. *Family Relations*, 30, 474-479.

Appendix A. Survey**Custodial Arrangement and the Parent-Child Relationship Survey****Demographic Information**

____ 1.) What is your gender?

- a.) Male (0)
- b.) Female (1)

____ 2.) What is your current age?

____ 3.) What was your age when your parents divorced?

____ 4.) What was your legal custodial arrangement after your parents' divorce? (Chose one)

- a.) Sole custody with mother and visitation with father. (1)
- b.) Sole custody with father and visitation with mother. (2)
- c.) Joint custody with equal shared time between mother and father. (3)
- d.) Sole custody with mother and no visitation with father. (4)
- e.) Sole custody with father and no visitation with mother. (5)
- f.) Other (ex. raised by other family members or different visitation arrangements) (6)

____ 5.) Who did you spend a majority of your time with as a child?

- a.) Mother (1)
- b.) Father (2)
- c.) Other _____ (3)

___6.) Did you receive any type of therapy or participate in a support group before or after your parents' divorce?

a.) Yes (1)

b.) No (2)

Parent-Child Relationships Survey

Please complete the following items about your mother and father.

1.) How much time do you feel you spend with your parent?

(1=almost none, 7=a great deal)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2.) How well do you feel you have been able to maintain a steady relationship with your parent?

(1=not at all, 7=extremely)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3.) How much do you trust your parent?

(1=not at all, 7=extremely)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4.) How confident are you that your parent would not ridicule or make fun of you if you were to talk about a problem?

(1=not at all, 7=extremely)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5.) How confident are you that your parent would help you when you have a problem?

(1=not at all, 7=extremely)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6.) How close do you feel to your parent?

(1=very distant, 7=very close)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7.) How comfortable would you be approaching your parent about a romantic problem?

(1=not at all, 7=extremely)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8.) How comfortable would you be talking to your parent about a problem at school?

(1=not at all, 7=extremely)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9.) How confused are you about the exact role your parent is to have in your life?

(1=not at all, 7=a great deal)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10.) How accurately do you feel you understand your parent's feelings, thoughts, and behavior?

(1=not at all, 7=a great deal)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11.) How easily do you accept the weaknesses in your parent?

(1=not at all, 7=extremely)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12.) To what extent do you think of your parent as an adult with a life of their own, as opposed to thinking of them only as your parent?

(1=think of as only a parent, 7=see as adult with life of their own)

Mother	Father
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13.) How often do you get angry at your parent?

(1=almost never, 7=quite often)

Mother	Father
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14.) In general, how much do you resent your parent?

(1=not at all, 7=a great deal)

Mother	Father
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15.) How well do you communicate with your parent?

(1=not at all, 7=extremely)

Mother	Father
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16.) How well does your parent understand your needs, feelings, and behavior?

(1=not at all, 7=extremely)

Mother	Father
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17.) How well does your parent listen to you?

(1=not at all, 7=extremely)

Mother	Father
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18.) How much do you care for your parent?

(1=not at all, 7=a great deal)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19.) When you are away from home, how much do you typically miss your parent?

(1=not at all, 7=a great deal)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20.) How much do you respect your parent?

(1=not at all, 7=a great deal)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21.) How much do you value your parent's opinion?

(1=not at all, 7=a great deal)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22.) How much do you admire your parent?

(1=not at all, 7=a great deal)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23.) How much would you like to be like your parent?

(1=not at all, 7=a great deal)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24.) How much would you be satisfied with your parent's life-style as your own?

(1=not at all, 7=extremely)	Mother	Father
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7