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## Co-Parenting Influences: A Positive Report for the Millenium

Andrea Chrismer-Still

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**COPARENTING INFLUENCES**  
**A POSITIVE REPORT FOR THE MILLENNIUM**

Andrea Chrismer-Still, B.A.

A Masters Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Lindenwood University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Art  
December, 1999

### *Abstract*

*In this correlational study of later adolescents who experience parental divorce, six coparenting influences were assessed in an effort to identify predictors and factors that contribute to overall satisfaction with life. Subjects completed a survey comprised of demographic information which included an adaptation of a survey (Silitsky, 1996), a Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, E. Simmons, R. Larsen, R. & Griffin, S., 1985), and a Perceived Social Support Family Scale (Pss-Fa) (Procidano, M. & Heller, K., 1983). The adapted scale and the PSS-Fa measured perceptions by the later adolescent of their family of origin and their levels of (1) parental conflict, (2) parental alcohol and drug use, (3) financial adequacy, (4) custody arrangements, (5) custodial/noncustodial parental affect, and (6) availability of social support. The scores of fifty-five male and females between the ages of 18-25 were analyzed using Correlational and Regression analyses. Results indicated higher than average Satisfaction With Life scores among the Subjects. The analyses showed significantly decreased Satisfaction With Life scores among later adolescents who perceived their custodial parent as sad and/or when they perceived the non-custodial parent as sad and a significantly increased satisfaction with life when desired time with the noncustodial parent was regular and predictable.*

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COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY

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Associate Professor Mary Utley, Ph.D.

## Dedication

This Thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, my father,  
and my sons and to all others who have experienced family transition due  
to divorce.

*We are all part of the longer now.*

James Redfield,  
The Celestine Prophecy

## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my love, gratitude, and appreciation to the following people:

The Lindenwood University Professional Counseling Department for guiding me through the program and inspiring me to aspire.

Dr. Utley, Dr. Warren, and Dr. Mueller for giving me permission to administer the survey and instruments to their Introductory Psychology students. With a special thanks to Dr. Utley for the seeds planted, for the support, and for the patience with a vision realized in me.

Dr. Sankar for helping me analyze the data.

Robert Blattner for the experience of unconditional positive regard and the experience of being heard and understood.

Robert D. Tackett for being my “computer guru”, for being immeasurably patient, supportive, dedicated and unconditionally loving. This journey would have had less quality, richness, and fulfillment were it not for your presence.

Adam H. Still...”every so called tormenter or tyrant will become your teacher. Reality is an interpretation.” Deepak Chopra.

My mother.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Since divorce rates have remained high, it is much more commonplace to meet an individual from a single-parent home, an individual who has experienced shared custody and/or an individual who has one or two stepparents. (Hines, 1997). In fact, the divorce rate has doubled since 1965 and annually divorce affects one million children across the United States. Researchers who have studied the impact of divorce on children view divorce not as a singular event but as a series of experiences. (Hetherington, 1979) Barbara Whitehead states this

“...reshaping and reorganizing of family structure may be viewed not as a single event but as a string of disruptive events: separation, divorce, life in a single-parent family, life with a parent and live-in lover, the remarriage of one or both parents, life in a one stepparent family combined with visits to another stepparent family; the breakup of one or both stepparent families.” (Whitehead, 1993, p. 50).

An especially important issue and an issue that seems to have yielded unclear information and inconsistent results in the literature and research data are the long term consequences on a child's well being. (Glen & Kramer, 1995; Gonzalez, Field, Lasko, Harding, Yando, & Bendell, 1995).

Early studies, according to Silitsky, seem to have been based on the assumption that divorce was necessarily a disaster and that it almost

certainly had negative consequences for the psychological adjustment of the child.(1996). Judith Wallerstein, well known for her longitudinal studies on the effects of divorce on children, conducted much of her research using the paradigm of the idealized family which consisted of the child intact with his/her family of origin. (1984, 1985, 1987).

While current empirical research and literature continue to support the view that children from divorced families tend to manifest pathology (Silitsky, 1996; Borkhuis & Patalano, 1998), new paradigms and discussions support that children from divorced families are not maladjusted in every case. Abelsohn and Saayman (1991) suggest that the view of divorce as a disaster was based on the paradigm of the two parent nuclear family as ideal (Silitsky, 1996; Krisman, 1997; Spruijt & deGoedde, 1997). Today this paradigm describes 14% of family structure. (Pipher, 1994). In fact, Hines reported "85% to 90% of children whose parents are divorced live with their mothers and have varying degrees of contact with noncustodial fathers." (Hines, 1997, p. 377).

Nevertheless, while the research may be quite ambiguous and incomplete, continuity could be found among the factors and predictors that contributed to positive levels of adjustment regardless of family structure. (Amato, 1987; Fincham & Grych, 1990; Spruijt et al, 1997). The contributing factors have their origins in the coparenting model. (Kissman, 1997; Emery, 1982; Hoffman, 1995; Buchanan, Maccoby, &

Dornbusch, 1991). The factors of coparenting influences include those post divorce family structures where a child experiences and perceives (1) low levels of conflict (Wallerstein, 1985; Glenn & Kramer, 1985; Hines, 1977; Emery, 1982; Booth & Edwards, 1989; Hoffman, 1995; Katz & Gottman, 1997; Kissman, 1997; Grych & Fincham, 1990), (2) financial adequacy (Emery, 1982; Hines, 1997; Kissman, 1997; Amato, 1987; Ware, 1984), (3) availability of social support (Amato, 1987; Wallerstein, 1985; Emery, 1982; Grinwald, 1995; Glen et al., 1985; Hines, 1977; Katz et al, 1997), (4) low levels of alcohol and drug use by the custodial/noncustodial parents (Hines, 1977; Silitsky, 1996), (5) where custody arrangement and visitation with the noncustodial parent allow for regular, predictable, and frequent visits (Wallerstein, 1985; Kissman, 1997; Glenn et al, 1985; Hoffman, 1995; Hines, 1977; Gonzelez et al., 1995), and (6) where the custodial and noncustodial parent are perceived as not sad by the youth (Silitsky, 1996; Booth & Edwards, 1989; Glenn et al., 1995).

The focus of this research will be to investigate satisfaction with life in later adolescent individuals who have experienced divorce and family transition amidst variability of coparenting influences. The later adolescent group was the research population of choice as research indicated that conducting studies (interviews, questionnaires, etc.) with this population tended to have beneficial effects. (Wallerstein, 1985) Secondly, research indicated a gap in studies done with

population as little attention has been given to the children of divorce in young adulthood (Amato, 1987; Hines, 1997; Glenn et al., 1995; Gonzalez et al,1995; Chase-Lasdale, et al., 1995; Fincham et al, 1990) and as previously stated the research reveals ambiguous results. Thirdly, they are the best resource for collecting information about their feelings and perceptions to describe their experience. (Amato,1987; Grinwald, 1995; Hetherington, 1979; Buchanan, et al. 1991).

Later adolescents are a group according to a recent issue of *Counseling Today* (February, 1999) who are in need of advocacy efforts. These young adults are not far from a time when they had little power to establish rules, policies, and laws that affected their life. D'Andrea and Daniels state "These individuals are often subjected to various forms of prejudice, discrimination and negative stereotyping that result in their being misunderstood, separated from, and stigmatized by the mainstream community." (p. 29). One later adolescent: Dora, age 22 stated: "I get mad at all these programs about how bad divorce is for children. They should tell both sides of the story. I felt pretty happy after the divorce. At least my mom and dad weren't fighting anymore." (Wallerstein, 1985, p. 550).

#### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine satisfaction with life in later adolescents who have experienced variability of coparenting influences regardless of family structure. The study will look at overall

dynamics in adolescents from step-parent families, single parent family, and divorced family structures. Later adolescents will include all male and female individuals between the ages of 18-22 as defined by Newman & Newman. (Newman & Newman, 1995) The examination of coparenting influences are operationalized as those family structures where the youth experiences and perceives (1) financial adequacy, (2) low levels of conflict, (3) low levels alcohol and drug use by family of origin, (4) perceived social support, (5) where the custodial/noncustodial parent is perceived as not sad and (6) where custody arrangement and visitation with noncustodial parent allow for regular, predictable and frequent visits.

Hypothesis:

1. There will be a relationship between satisfaction with life in adolescents from divorced family of origin and perception of 1) financial adequacy, 2) conflict, 3) alcohol and drug use, 4) social support, 5) custodial/noncustodial affect, and 6) custody and visitation arrangement.

## Chapter II

### Review of the Literature

#### Erikson and Newman Theory

The psychosocial theory developed by Erik Erikson states that human life as the individual experiences it is produced by the interaction and modification of three major systems: the biological system, the psychological system, and the societal system. (Newman et al., 1995). Central to Erikson's theory is his conviction that each culture promotes different paths of development (Berger, 1980). Therefore, while individuals are unique based on their cultural background, there are some common patterns of development. Erikson conceptualized eight stages of development as outlined in Table 1. Erikson named the tension experienced by the individual with society's expectation and the decision to grow and develop to the next stage: the psychosocial crisis.

Table 1

#### Erikson Theory

Biological	Psychological	Societal
Birth to 1	Trust vs. Mistrust	Babies learn either to trust or mistrust that others will care for their basic needs, including nourishment, sucking, warmth cleanliness, and physical contact



Table 1 continued

Biological	Psychological	Societal
1-3 years	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Children learn to be self-sufficient in many activities, including toileting, feeding, walking and talking, or to doubt their own abilities
3-6 years	Initiative vs. Guilt	Children want to undertake many adultlike activities, sometimes overstepping the limits set by parents and feeling guilty
7-11 years	Industry vs. Inferiority	Children are busy learning to be competent and productive, or feel inferior and unable to do anything well
Adolescence	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Adolescents try to figure out "Who am I?" They establish sexual, ethnic, and career identities or are confused about what future roles to play.

(Berger, 1980)

Newman and Newman (1995) expanded and modified Erikson's original eight life stages into eleven stages and separated Erikson's original stage of adolescence into early and late periods as outlined in Table 2. Table 2 more specifically outlines the critical developmental tasks the individual must psychologically master to adjust to the social environment. This study shall focus specifically on the stage of later adolescence with the satisfactory resolution of previous stages or lack thereof relative to the study.

Table 2

## Newman and Newman Theory

Biological	Psychological	Developmental Tasks
Birth to 2	Trust vs. Mistrust	Social attachment Maturation of sensory, perceptual, and motor functions Sensorimotor intelligence and primitive causality Understanding the nature of objects and creation of categories Emotional development
2-4 years	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Elaboration of locomotion Fantasy play Language development Self-control
4-6 years	Initiative vs. Guilt	Sex-role identification Early moral development Self-theory Group play
6-12 years	Industry vs. Inferiority	Friendship Concrete operations Skill learning Self-evaluation Team play
Early Adolescence (12-18)	Group Identity vs. Identity Confusion	Physical maturation Formal operations Emotional development Membership in the peer group Sexual relationships
Later Adolescence (18-22)	Individual Identity vs. Identity Confusion	Autonomy from parents Gender identity Internalized morality Career choice

(Newman &amp; Newman., 1995)

The Later Adolescent

Newman and Newman conceptualized later adolescence as the ages between 18-22. The psychosocial crisis of this stage is the

identity crisis with the overarching theme being identity development. As outlined in Table 2, there are critical developmental tasks at each stage of development. The tasks of the later adolescent according to this theory are Autonomy from Parents, Gender Identity, Internalized Morality, and Career Choice. This stage has been described by theorists as a time of profound inner turmoil and external conflict. (Hines, 1997). Kohlberg, a theorist who developed theories on reasoning and morality describe adolescence as a time of cognitive changes as thinking moves from concrete to higher levels of reasoning. Further, that "the impact of adolescent development on close relationships and associated behaviors is influenced by contextual factors such as gender of the adolescent and parent as well as family structure and ethnicity". (Hines, 1997, p. 378). The basic concepts of psychosocial theory and understanding patterns of normal growth and development provide a context for exploring a later adolescent who has been subjected to a disruptive family environment due to divorce and/or other transition.

#### Family Structure

What constitutes a family? As the 21st century approaches there is a heightened sensitivity to family issues. (Footlick, 1989). Newsweek listed different definitions of what constitutes a family. The article states:

“Webster offers 22 definitions, the Census Bureau has settled on ‘two or more persons related by birth, marriage or adoption who reside in the same household’, a New York High Court set four standards for a family including 1) the exclusivity and longevity of a relationship, 2) the level of emotional and financial commitment 3) how the couple conducted their everyday lives and held them out to society and 4) the reliance placed upon one another for daily services. A State of California task force came up with another conclusion as it defines a family in terms of things it does for its members. The things being functions and include maintaining the physical health and safety of its members, help shape a belief system of goals and values, teach social skills, and create a place for recuperation from external stresses.

(Footlick, 1989, p. 18).

Whatever definition applies or does not apply to the definition of family in the 21st century, the controversy continues to define “family”. Yet children are growing and developing amidst the reshaping and reorganizing. What would be helpful is to focus in on the research that examines family structures as they exist to explore how the dynamics and processes of these structures are influencing the adolescent and *their* issues in terms of their developmental tasks.

#### Traditional vs. Nontraditional

In later adolescence, the individual is revising and reevaluating the lessons learned at earlier stages of development about gender roles and morality and synthesizing the information with the new emerging self. (Newman et al., 1995; Hines, 1997). With 85-90% of children living with their mothers and with varying degrees of contact with their fathers who live apart, “roles and responsibilities are bound to “deviate” from the

traditional family model which has often been idealized as the preferred model..." (Krisman, 1997, p. 79). In fact, two long standing assumptions with regard to divorce and children have been parental separation always has negative effects and the traditional family model provided a better environment. (Vandewater & Landsford, 1998). Judith Wallerstein, well known for her longitudinal studies on the effects of divorce on children, conducted much of her research using the paradigm of the idealized family. (Wallerstein, 1984, 1985, 1987). The studies describe the devastating effects of divorce for children's adjustment and well being. Researchers have criticized this perspective for not addressing the influence of family process.

In a study conducted by Amato (1987), children from intact, divorced one-parent, and remarried families reported on family processes. As Amato noted development is impacted by the effects and changes in relationships by all those involved in the family structure not only the family of origin but others included in the system. (1987). Data were collected from 172 primary school age children and 170 adolescents. The purpose of the study was to focus on the child's outcome including emotional adjustment, behavior problems, academic failure, and juvenile delinquency. The family processes measures included: Mother and Father Support, Parental Control, Parental Punishment, Household Responsibility, Sibling Relations, Family Cohesion, Marital Conflict, and Child Autonomy. Amato's analysis reported ambiguous results. On the one hand, stepfamilies showed an increased standard of living, and stable intimate

relationships. On the other hand, Amato found discipline to be an issue because of different household rules as well as rivalry with the stepfather for maternal affection. Guilt was also found among those children who liked the stepfather due to loyalty conflicts. The study also reported low maternal control and virtually nonexistent paternal control.

#### Applications of Newman's Theory

Additional research revealed further ambiguous findings with regard to family process from the later adolescents perspective. On one hand, the adolescent may experience difficulty in step-family structure. The difficulty stems from the task of processing values and morals as they fit with one's new emerging self (Hines, 1997) with the processing of values and morals from two separate households. (Chase-Lansdale et al. 1995; Grinwald, 1995; Hines, 1997). Secondly, there are challenges in the area of communication. The adolescent over the years has developed patterns of communication with the biological parent(s) that may be ineffective with a stepparent(s). (Grinwald, 1995). The adolescent is also processing relationship, gender, and role issues and synthesizing previous lessons learned within the newly formed familial context. Wallerstein (1985) found in a follow up study that the later adolescents were concerned about the maintenance of love relationships and that they did not want to repeat divorce. Spruijt, E. & deGoedde, M, (1997) also reported that adolescents had more doubts about

future marriage and family life.

On the other hand, with regard to the developmental task of Autonomy from Parent(s), Hines found the transition may be advantageous as adolescents are seeking to loosen and renegotiate parental ties (1997). In the aforementioned study conducted by Amato, results revealed while there was a low level of cohesion, there was more autonomy and flexibility to change and less rigidity regarding role expectation. (1987). While the low control from parents may reflect a lack of supervision, it may also reflect the increased maturity of the youth and less strict control is necessary. (Amato, 1987). Further findings reveal that due to the increased brain development, the adolescent could cognitively consider that their parents were ill suited for each other thus diminishing their anger. (Wallerstein, 1985).

#### Satisfaction with Life

In general, according to Hines (1997), studies have shown that healthy adolescence is facilitated by parent-child interactions that maintain a strong bond, that can withstand differences between the adolescent and his/her parents and where there is a sensitive climate toward the adolescents growing sense of individuality. Glenn, N. & Kramer, K. (1995) reported on a study conducted by Nock in terms of the data that satisfaction with life as most indicative of psychological well being. Yet at issue are the long term consequences on well being relative to divorce and family transition. (Glenn et al., 1995; Gonzalez et al., 1995).

### Family Structure

Glenn N, & Kramer, K, 1995 conducted a study where they investigated the effects of parental divorce on eight dimensions of well being within five different family structures including: a) living with both parents, b) living with one parent due to biological parental death, c) living with one parent and a step parent, d) living with one parent due to parental divorce and e) living with one parent and stepparent due to parental death. The dimensions of well being were measured by the independent variables including age, fathers occupation, fathers years of school completed, mothers years of school completed, size of community, number of siblings, religion, mother employed before the child was six. The Regression analysis revealed no large or consistent differences in well being. (1995).

### Family Transition

Another hypothesis that was tested in terms of psychological well being was transition. As the later adolescent is working through much developmental transition, (Grinwald, 1995) additional family transition would only exacerbate the situation. Not so according to an empirical study conducted by Spruijt and deGoede (1997). Four different types of family structure were distinguished: stable intact family, conflict intact family, single-parent family, and stepfamily to examine the effect of structural family life on adolescent well being. One of their hypothesis was that the more the young people had been confronted with transitions in



their parental family, the less physical and psychological well being they experience. Results revealed those youngsters from stepfamilies and those who would have undergone the most transitions, did not have the most extreme negative scores. (1997). Wallerstein (1985) also found emerging patterns of good psychological adjustment in post divorced families at the 5 year mark in her 10 year follow up study.

However, current and earlier research does support the adverse effects of divorce on youth and psychological well being. For example, in a study conducted with adolescents investigating personality differences utilizing the MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) significant personality differences were found in those adolescents from divorced families and those from nondivorced families. In a 2 x 2 analysis of variance significant personality differences were found on scales of depression, hysteria, psychasthenia, schizophrenia anxiety, ego strength, dependency, self-alienation and total profile with significant scale results between male and females. (Borkhuis & Patalano, 1998).

Chase and Lansdale (1995) also discuss in their research the small growing amount of research that consistently concludes that "divorce in childhood is associated with problematic patterns of family formation in young adulthood". (p. 1614-1615). The problematic patterns were further described by Booth A. & Edwards, J. (1989) and include children of divorce being more likely to become pregnant as teenagers, to cohabit and more likely to experience the

dissolution of their own marriage. (1989). Nevertheless, Chase-Lansdale, P., Cherlin, A., & Kiernan, K. (1995) do discuss in their research that several large scale surveys with nationally representative samples find most long term negative effects of divorce in childhood or adolescence on adult well being to be moderate. However, the lower levels of satisfaction with life increased levels of psychological distress those who sought counseling.

#### Other Influential Factors

What did emerge out of the studies conducted by Glenn et al.(1995) and Gonzalez et al.(1995) were other influential factors that may likely impact on long term well being. These factors included the effects of parental conflict, emotional problems of the custodial parent, including marital conflict, family dysfunction, buffers, parental psychopathology and poor parenting skills. In their own longitudinal study Chase-Lansdale et al.(1995) attempt to explore the questions "Does divorce during childhood have long term consequences on adult mental health?" and "Do subsequent life events or developmental capacities counteract negative effects of divorce?" (p. 1615). The instruments utilized had good reliability and validity and their findings support that on average, the effects on mental health are moderate, and these 'other influential factors' did have an effect on adjustment.

These 'other influential factors' along with other measures of well being were examined in a research study done by Silitsky (1996). Silitsky

examined conflict between parents, the psychological adjustment of the custodial parent, as indicated by symptoms of depression and alcohol abuse, custody and visitation arrangements, and the remarriage of the custodial parent. The sample consisted of 436 adolescents, 215 from intact families and 221 from divorced families of at least two years. The study used several instruments for assessment including the YSR (Youth Self Report) and FACES. The results revealed that the psychosocial adjustment of the adolescents from divorced families were related positively to the psychological adjustment of the custodial parent and availability of social support. Further that the psychosocial adjustment was related negatively to conflict. Interestingly, the factors predicting adjustment among the adolescents in the intact family were quite similar to the factors predicting adjustment in the divorced group. (1996).

#### The Coparenting Model

Gonzalez, K., Field, T., Lasko, D., Harding, J. Yando, R. & Bendell, D. (1995) noted the first wave of divorce research addressed the question of whether children were affected by divorce. The second wave began to look at specific variables. The specific variables include social/psychological variables and those related to the process of divorce such as timing and custodial arrangement. Flowing from these two waves of research emerged the coparenting model. (Buchanan et al., 1991). The coparenting model is the intersection of 'Discord' and 'Cooperative Communication'. Discord is conceptualized

as the degree to which the parents disagreed, argued, and tried to undermine one another in parenting. Cooperative Communication is the degree to the which the parents tried to communicate and parent co-operatively. The two dimensions yield four coparenting patterns as displayed in Figure 1. Quadrant 1 describes a family structure where there is high discord and low cooperative communication. The biological parents are described as "Conflicted". Quadrant 2 describing a family structure where there is low discord and low cooperative communication were called "Disengaged". Quadrant 3 family structures where there is high 'Discord' and high 'Cooperative Communication' are 'Rare'.

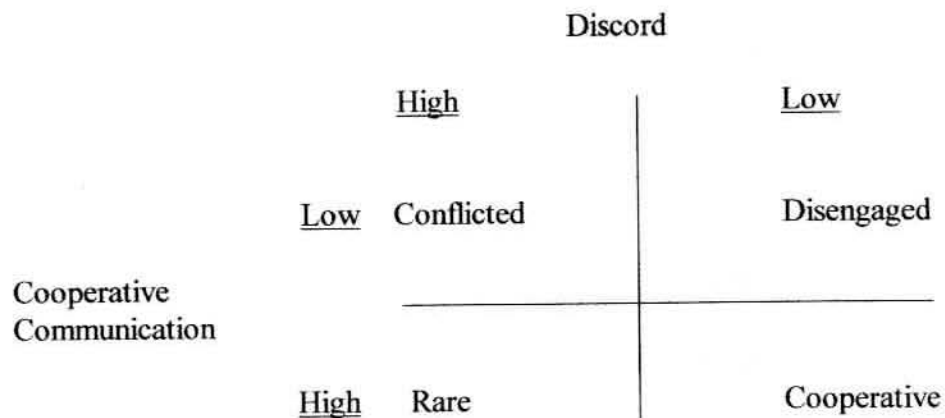


Fig 1 - The Coparenting Model

Lastly, Quadrant 4 describes a 'Cooperative' family structure where there is low 'Discord' and High Cooperative Communication'. (Buchanan et al., 1991).

The Coparenting Model originated not only from

the divorce literature but also has its origins in systems theory (Buchanan et al., 1991). Systems theorists describe subsystems, boundaries, and triangulation. Buchanan notes that when parents try to form alliances with the child against the other parent or when the parent-parent and parent-child subsystem boundaries are unclear, the child has the experience of being caught. (1991).

In the study conducted by Buchanan et al. (1991) adolescents were examined in terms of their feelings of being caught in tension loyalty conflicts, marital conflict, and coparenting to measure their post divorce adjustment. Findings might be as predicted in that where the child experienced high parental conflict and low parental cooperation, he/she felt caught. Being close to both parents was associated with low feelings of being caught.

#### CoParenting Influences

Kalter and Rembar (1981) found in their examination of research studies involving young people that within a year following the parental separation most youths were able to take up their individual agendas and proceed. However, that there were "factors...other than the child's developmental level important in determining reactions and adjustment to parental divorce" (p. 87). Six coparenting variables emerged from the research literature consistently. A necessary step in further specifying the relationship between satisfaction with life and coparenting

influences is to define these particular variables more precisely within the Coparenting Model framework.

#### Custodial Arrangement and Visitation

Research reveals that most children of divorced parents are placed in the custody of the mother. (Wallerstein, 1984; Silitsky, 1996). The divorce literature has generally supported the view that close relationships between noncustodial father and their children are in the long term best interest of the child. Further, children of divorce report wanting contact with their fathers and a real sense of loss when whatever relationship they may have had with their father prior to the parental separation diminishes or disappears (Hoffman, 1995). Current research on the noncustodial father is progressing from the negative effects of father absence to successful models of coparenting where the father shares in the child rearing while living apart from the biological mother.(Kissman, 1997). In a study conducted by Charles Hoffman (1995), noncustodial fathers were surveyed regarding their children and the effect of the relationship on their child's post divorce adjustment. The evidence of the study revealed that if the noncustodial father participated in parenting the child, it contributed significantly to his evaluation of the child's post divorce adjustment.

However, the success of the father's participating in

parenting was found to be contingent on the level of conflict in the parent dyad. (Kissman, 1997; Hoffman, 1995). This is relative in that the interaction was positively impacted when the biological parent maintained a functional level of cohesion where the ex-wife was supportive and cooperative. (Hoffman, 1995). Arditit & Kelly (1994) found the positive relationship with the ex-wife was the strongest predictor of fathers assuming coparental responsibilities in terms of visits and quality of time.

Kissman and Hoffman (1995, 1997) both describe however, the weakness of the research that investigates relationships between children and the noncustodial parent. Specifically, that the research draws conclusions about divorce and long term adjustment when more often than not the responses from fathers are low and/or the data is incomplete with information too often obtained from the mothers.

Yet the impact of father involvement and frequency of father visits according to Kissman's (1997) research has been associated with higher academic achievement, self-esteem, competence and well-being. It is important for boys as they resolve the developmental psychosocial crisis of industry vs. inferiority. Specifically, in this area in terms of planning, problem solving, building, and exploring. For adolescent females, father involvement may delay sexual activity.

### Conflict

As outlined in the Coparenting Model, a conflicted family structure is one where there is high discord and low cooperative communication. Literature on changing family structure suggest that parental conflict, regardless of particular composition of the household has very profound effects on children. (Booth et al, 1989). Katz et al (1997) found marital distress and conflict to have been associated with depression, withdrawal, poor social competence, health problems, poor academic performance, and conduct related difficulties. The consequences of which last well beyond childhood. Other recent literature report conflict between parents to be one of the most powerful variables mediating childrens post divorce adjustment. (Hoffman, 1995; Glenn et al., 1995; Hines, 1997). Evidence also supports that it is the interparental conflict, not separation that may be the principal explanation for the association found between divorce and childhood problems. (Emery, 1982).

According to researchers, conflict can be viewed from two perspectives. The first perspective would explore the process of conflict, the content of conflict and the duration of conflict. The process of conflict would relate to how the individuals handle the conflict behaviorally in terms of hitting, arguing, or avoiding. The content relates to what the conflict is about



namely sex, child rearing, and/or money. The duration has to do with how long the conflict continues and how long the child is subjected to the tension and conflict. (Emery, 1982; Grych et al., 1990). Marital conflict can also be considered in terms of frequency and intensity. (Grych et al., 1990).

The second perspective would explore how the child processes and responds to the conflict. Grych et al. (1990) developed a cognitive-contextual framework for investigating interparental conflict and children's response. During the primary processing phase, the child first becomes aware of the conflict. "Primary processing may lead to secondary processing during which the child attempts to understand why the conflict is occurring and what he or she should do in response." (p. 278). Another layer of the framework relates to context. The context of conflict contains two elements: distal and proximal. Distal context includes the child's past experiences with conflict, temperament, gender, and perceived emotional climate of the family structure. Proximal context includes the child's current mood and expectations for the course of conflict. This study found significant differences between children from high and low conflict families. Further, while they found no age group to be particularly vulnerable to conflict, how the children responded behaviorally and affectively did change with age. (Grych et al., 1990).

In a study reported on by Emery (1982), two groups of children were compared. One group of the children were from homes broken by divorce or separation and the other group of children were from homes broken by death of a parent. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between family structure and conflict. The results of the study found more behavior problems in children from divorced homes as opposed to the children from homes broken by death. This suggested that something other than separation had affected the children. Further, the group of children from broken homes by divorce but that were conflict free were less likely to have behavior problems. (1982).

Vandewater and Lansford (1998) also examined the influences of family structure and parent conflict on well being. The study included data from a randomly selected, nationally representative sample that included 618 parent-child dyads. The children were between 10-17. The family structures included in the study were married - never divorced and divorced - not remarried. The parents in the family structures were then divided into high and low parental conflict. Well being was measured in terms of internalizing and externalizing behavior and trouble with peers. Results of the study revealed that parental conflict negatively affected all three aspects of children's well being and that family structure was not related to these measures of well being.

### Availability of Social Support

Individual identity vs. Identity confusion is the psychosocial crisis of the later adolescent as presented in Table 2 according to the Newman et al. theory. (1995). As previously stated, this stage has been described by theorists as a time of profound inner turmoil and external conflict (Hines, 1997). The inner conflict and confusion emerges as the later adolescent is shaping identity amidst changing social demands, parental expectations, and one's own inner sense of values and beliefs. (Newman, 1995). The conflicted feelings and confusion put later adolescents at risk for loneliness. Divorce and family transition according to one research study put later adolescents at *greater* risk for loneliness. (Shaver & Rubenstein, 1980). Shaver et al explains the greater risk for loneliness due to the loss of parental attachment. Hines found that during the crisis of divorce and two years following, the parent-child relationship is disrupted when the parents are likely to be physically and/or psychologically unavailable. (1997). Katz, L. & Gottman, J. (1997) describe unavailability as a parent who is more negative and rejecting, less warm and responsive and a parent whose discipline is inconsistent. Positive adjustment is related to closeness to the resident parent, parental monitoring, joint decisions, a more egalitarian climate between the parents and the adolescent and low conflict. (Hines, 1997). Emery found in his research study as previously

described, that a good relationship with one parent can buffer the child from some of the negative affects of marital turmoil. (1982).

Katz et al. (1997) more specifically examined how the child is buffered through the parent-child interaction. This research identified several interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that moderate negative outcomes associated with marital conflict and dissolution. They examined characteristics of the child including level of intelligence, peer interaction, child physiological functioning, the marital relationship, and emotional regulation of the child, and they examined parental warmth, parental scaffolding/praise, inhibition of parental rejection and meta-emotion.

Before examining the results of the study, parental warmth is defined as the amount of parental affection, the responsiveness of the parent, positive structuring, and a meta-emotion philosophy by the parents. (Hines, 1997). Meta-emotion is the degree of awareness the parent has about his/her own feelings. The new dimension of parenting referred to as "emotion coaching" is the degree to which the parent is able to respond to the child's feelings. Parental/scaffolding is defined as "the sum of parental affection, engagement, positive structuring, responsiveness across parents, and mother enthusiasm." (Katz et al., 1997, p. 161).

Results revealed that parental warmth buffered children against negative outcomes in academic achievement and emotion

regulation ability. When marital conflict was at issue, parental scaffolding/praising, nonderogatory parenting, parental awareness and coaching of the child's emotions, basal vagal tone, vagal suppression, and child intelligence buffered children against negative outcomes on the child's negative affect with peers (observed) and academic achievement. No variables completely buffered children faced with high levels of marital conflict and dissolution from showing externalizing and internalizing behavior problems. Individual child characteristics including the child's intelligence and a physiological substrate of a temperamental characteristic - the vagal tone reduced children's vulnerability (partially buffered) to the negative outcomes. The researchers also noted that the reduction of child vulnerability to negative outcomes may be related to genetic and environmental influences as well. Each variable indexing marital dissolution was related to at least one child outcome variable. Another major conclusion is the power of the wife's affect particularly her contempt toward her husband to predict child outcome three years later. The study also found that meta-emotion variables provide complete buffers for emotional regulation, teacher ratings of negative peer relations, observed negative affect with a peer and child illness. (1997).

Gonzalez et al. (1995) address the significance of the availability of social support in their study that examined 440 adolescents from intact and divorced families. Adolescents perceived more intimacy with their fathers when their visits were monthly and frequent. As previously mentioned

one of the features of parental warmth is a climate where the adolescent perceives a certain level of communication and affection. Grinwald (1995) did a study that compared three groups of adolescents from differing family structure with regard to communication. The results of this study revealed communication to be lowest in step-families and best in biological families. Affection was also found to be less in step-families in terms of availability of the social support issue. (1995). Silitsky (1996) found also that the availability of social support does serve as an important stress buffering function.

There are several additional findings with regard to social support. First of all, Hines (1997) found peers to be a buffer for adolescents during this psychosocial crisis and secondly, Wallerstein (1995) found the sibling relationship to be a buffer. Thirdly, that children perceive maternal support to be dependable and constant regardless of the family structure. (Amato, 1991). Finally, one distinguishing feature of the one parent family is that its support system takes many forms including those in the community and in the extended family. (Kissman, 1997).

#### Financial Adequacy

Divorce is often associated with changes in financial status. (Emery, 1982). Typically a reduction in income for households where the mother retains custody (Hines, 1997,

Amato & Keith, 1991). Ware found:

“only 14% of divorced or separated women receive any alimony at all 78.2% of all divorced mothers have to have a job, regardless of the age of their children; 69.3% of divorced women with children never even receive child support from fathers. Divorced mothers under thirty who do get child support receive an average of \$1,290.00 annually, and divorced mothers over thirty get around \$2,060.00”. Therefore, most children are living relatively in poverty.  
(1984. p. 44)

In the aforementioned study by Spruijt et al. (1997), they found apart from the effect of type of family structure, family income seems to have a particularly negative effect on physical and psychological well being. (1997). On the other hand, financial adequacy can mitigate divorce as a stressor. Silitsky found divorce as a stressor can be mitigated by financial adequacy. (1996). Kissman found providing financial support to children equals those who nurture and take active roles in caring for their children. (1997).

#### Parental Affect

Family relationships must be understood in light of the psychological adjustment of the parents (Hines, 1997). Glenn et al. state “it seems likely that any negative effects of parental divorce were largely through influences associated with emotional problems of the custodial parent.” (1995, p. 91). Silitsky’s (1996) research revealed a relationship between depression of the custodial parent and

adolescent psychological adjustment. The YSR (Youth Self Report), one of the instruments used in the study, subscales for internalizing and externalizing pathology and social problems. In this study results revealed that the YSR symptom scales related positively to depression of the custodial parent. (1996)

Moreover, Booth et al.(1989) studied the effect of parental divorce and unhappiness and its transmission of marital and family quality over the generations. They found that remaining in an unhappy marriage has many adverse and stronger effects than the parental divorce. The reason is due to the duration of the experience. In other words, in the unhappy home the problem continues but in the case of divorce it may end in dissolution. When the problem continues the adolescent is subjected to poor role models and it lowers their expectations for marriage. (1989)

Booth et al did find a positive relationship between the parent and child and the degree of childhood happiness to be good predictors of subsequent adjustment in the child's marriage. They also found the obverse to be true. They also found generational trends in that if the parents stuck it out the children will stick it out.

Finally, Katz et al. address the significance of parental affect when they state "the power of the wife's affect, particularly her contempt for her husband to predict child outcome". (1997, p. 165).



### Alcoholism and Drug Abuse

Alcoholism and drug abuse are more common among divorced adults than nondivorced adults. (Hines, 1997). Silitsky used alcohol abuse in his study as a measure of the psychological adjustment of the custodial parent. Results of Silitsky's research study revealed substance abuse by the custodial parent related positively to all three of the YSR symptom subscales. The YSR (Youth Self Report) as previously described included subscales for internalizing and externalizing pathology and social problems. (1996)

In a Meta-Analysis conducted by Amato (1991), 15 variables effecting well being were coded. Well being was also subcategorized with psychological well being one of the domains of study. The effect size for all studies investigated reported lower levels of well being with the strongest variable occurring in the behavior/conduct area. Alcohol and drug abuse were included in the behavior/conduct area.

### Additional Factors: Sex and Age

The research thus far has supported that psychological adjustment of the later adolescent can be influenced by the variables of custodial arrangement and visitation, levels of conflict, the availability of social support, financial adequacy, parental affect, and levels of alcohol and

drug use. Two additional factors were reported in the research literature: age and sex. (Hines, 1997; Wallerstein, 1984; Emery, 1982; Gonzalez et al, 1995; Grinwald, 1995, Booth et al, 1989; Silitsky, 1996; Kalter et al, 1981). However, the results of these research studies addressing age and sex variables were so contradictory, these variables were not examined in the present correlational study. For example, Booth et al's results reveal that in every case, females are more adversely affected by divorce than males. (1989). Yet Wallerstein and Hines found males significantly more troubled. (1985, 1997). Amato found sex of the child did not yield significant results. (1987). Grinwald, on the other hand did find significant difference between gender (1995). Several studies described the negative psychological symptoms that may manifest in female and male individuals. (Kalter, et al., 1981, Silitsky, 1996) Specifically, Kalter et al., found whereas male individuals may exhibit more externally, females exhibit more internally. (1981). Results of Silitsky's (1996) study concur with Kalter et al., (1981).

Emery (1982) found all age groups to be substantially affected by divorce Gonzalez et al.(1995) found divorce did vary as a function of child variables such as age and gender. Kalter et al.(1997) found that the literature contains "decidedly differing points of view." (p. 87). Further, that the failure to control for sex and age give rise to misleading results in studies of childrens psychological adjustment. (1981). Kalter conducted a study

to address the association between the timing of divorce and its impact on child development. 144 youngsters were divided into four subgroups. The subgroups included latency boys, latency girls, adolescent boys, and adolescent girls. The study investigated the effects of age on timing of the 1) marital separation and at the time of 2) the divorce. In order to capture the process of divorce, age was categorized as pre-oedipal, oedipal, and post-oedipal. While the results of the study found only minimal support for their hypotheses, what they did find was that timing of divorce was associated with different kinds of vulnerabilities. The vulnerabilities in part are related to developmental issues as they relate to the psychosocial crises described in Tables 1 and 2. For example, if the "marital dissolution occurs at the time when the child is coping with the normal developmental task of separating from parents...special vulnerability to separation-related difficulties in latency may be established." (p. 97).

In keeping with the second wave of divorce research, the present study will investigate specific variables related to the affects of divorce. The specific variables that consistently emerged from the literature include 1) custodial arrangement and visitation, 2) conflict, 3) availability of social support, 4) financial adequacy, 5) parental affect, and 6) alcohol and drug use. In the present study, these specific variables are defined as coparenting influences. It was hypothesized that there would be a relationship between perception of and experience with coparenting influences and satisfaction with life among later adolescents from divorced family of origin.

### Chapter III

#### Methodology

##### Subjects:

Subjects for this study were selected from the population 18-25 year old, male and female undergraduate students of a Midwestern University. Appendix A displays demographic information of the student population of this University obtained from the Registrar's office. The total population of full-time undergraduate students is comprised of 1,371 males and 1,861 females. The total population of part-time undergraduate students includes 239 males and 537 females. Among the total population of male and female full time undergraduate students, 78% (n=2507) are White, 2% (n=47) are Hispanic, 0.5% (n=17) are Asian, 0.5% (n=14) are Indian, 9% (n=289) are Black, 4% (n=134) are Foreign and 6% (n=224) are unknown. Among the total population of part-time undergraduate students, 15% (n=114) are White, 0.25% (n=2) are Hispanic, 0.25% (n=1) are Indian, 1% (n=8) are Black, 0.45% (n=3) are Foreign and 1% (n=6) are Unknown. Survey and instruments were distributed to at least 100 individuals. A large sample was sought due to the large number of variables being examined. Two possible source of sample bias are that the sample is one of convenience and that the sample is a volunteer sample. Those students who chose to participate may be more

motivated to participate due to their strong interest in the topic.

The sample included fifty-five students enrolled in the Introductory Psychology classes at Lindenwood University.

Administration of the survey and instruments had to be expanded beyond the Interactive Psychology class to other Introductory Psychology classes in order to collect enough data.

Forty-two percent ( $n=23$ ) of subjects were male and 58.2% ( $n=32$ ) were female, 80% reported 'middle' socioeconomic status, 9% reported 'lower' socioeconomic status and 11% reported 'upper' socioeconomic status. The mean age of the sample was 20.31 years with a standard deviation of 1.39, ranging from 18 years to maximum age of 24. The subjects were 74.5% ( $n=41$ ) Caucasian, 20% ( $n=11$ ) African American, and 3.6% ( $n=2$ ) Other. Figure 2 displays current living arrangements. Twenty-nine percent ( $n=16$ ) reported custody arrangements to be with mother and stepfather, 21.8% ( $n=12$ ) reported living with mother, and 23.6% ( $n=13$ ) reported living with Others. Figure 3 displays custody arrangements at the time of divorce; 65.5% ( $n=36$ ) reported living with mother as the custody arrangement before being emancipated and 27.3% ( $n=15$ ) reported joint custody. Sixty-two percent ( $n=34$ ) of those surveyed indicated their mother had remarried.

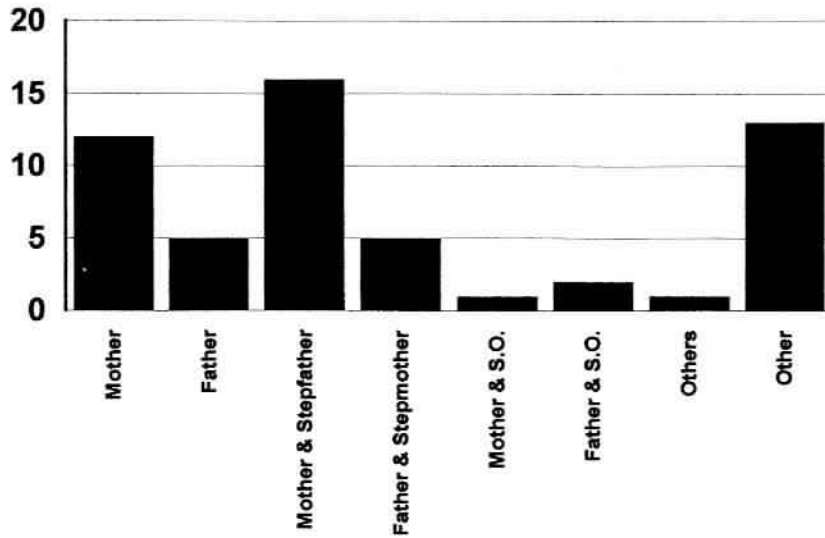


Fig 2 - Current Living Arrangements

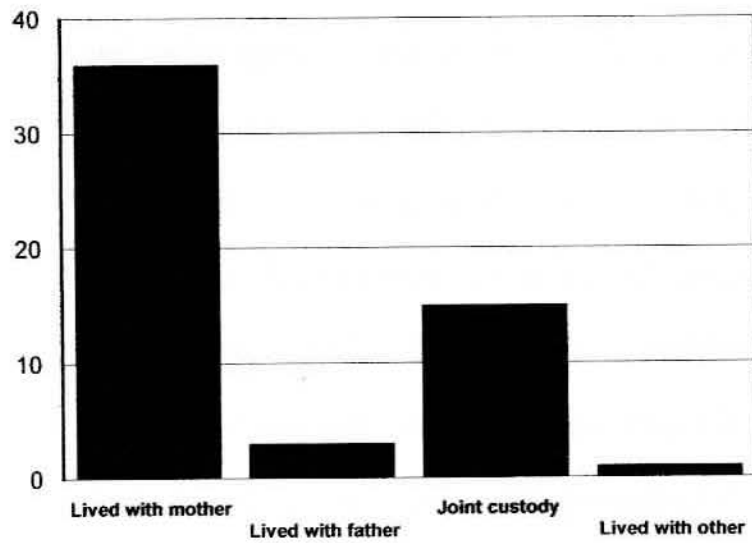


Fig.3- Custody arrangements at time of divorce

Instruments:

Questions included in the Demographic Data Sheet (Appendix C) were adopted from a survey developed by Daniel Silitsky. (1996). Silitsky's survey included 11 items. These items are measured on a rating scale. The Subjects circled the appropriate response by circling 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly disagree, 4 = Slightly agree, 5 = Agree, and 6 = Strongly Agree. The items were developed for adolescents from divorced families to assess the adolescents' report of perceptions of parental conflict, depression and substance abuse in the custodial parent, frequency and predictability of contact with noncustodial parent, and family finances, and his/her age at the time of divorce. The reliability of the items was assessed by a two-week test retest pilot study of adolescents from divorced (n=20) and intact families (n=20). "These students were recruited at a high school in New Jersey and were not included in the study proper." (p.156) The test-retest reliabilities of the researcher-developed items ranged from .75 to 1.00, with a median of .96. In this study, the items were modified to explore the adolescents' perceptions of the *noncustodial* parent as well as the custodial parent. Therefore, two additional items were added: 'My noncustodial parent seems sad.' and 'My noncustodial parent has a problem with alcohol or drugs.'. Since subjects were over 18 years of age and most likely

emancipated, questions were asked regarding the custody arrangements in the past.

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Appendix D) is an instrument which measures the levels of life satisfaction. The SWLS scale was developed by Diener E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., and Griffin, S. (1985) and is a 5-item questionnaire that is used to assess subjective life satisfaction.

The SWLS was originally studied using 176 undergraduates from the University of Illinois with a mean age of 23.5 and standard deviation of 6.43. For each item, subjects can choose from the following seven choices: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Slightly agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly agree. Item scores are summed for a total score. Scores may range from 5 to 35, with higher scores reflecting more satisfaction with life. With respect to reliability, the SWLS has very good internal consistency, with an alpha of .87. The instrument also has excellent test-retest reliability, with a correlation of .82 for a two-month period, which seems to suggest that the instrument is stable. The SWLS has been tested for concurrent validity using two samples of college students although no quantitative data was reported. Scores correlated with nine measures of subjective well-being for both samples. The SWLS has also been shown to correlate with self-esteem, a checklist of clinical



symptoms, neuroticism, and emotionality. Verbal permission was granted to utilize the instrument by Dr. Deiner at the University of Illinois.

The Perceived Social Support - Family (PSS-Fa) (Appendix E) is a 20-item instrument designed to measure the degree one perceives his/her needs for support as fulfilled by family. The instrument was developed by Procidano, M.E. and Heller, K. (1983) and was normed with another instrument the Perceived Social Support - Friends (PSS-Fr) which is also a 20-item instrument normed on a sample of 222 undergraduate psychology students. The mean and the standard deviation for the Pss-Fa was 13.40 and 4.83 respectively. The PSS-Fa is scored "yes", "no", and "don't know" ("don't know" is scored 0). Answers of "no" to items 3,4,16,19, and 20 are scored +1, and for all other items a "yes" answers is scored +1. Scale scores are the total of item scores and range from 0 to 20. Higher scores reflect more perceived social support. With respect to reliability, the PSS has internal consistency of .90. The test-retest coefficient of stability over a one-month period was .83. The reliability data was based on the original 20-item PSS before the items were separated from friends and family. Alphas for the final PSS-Fa ranged from .88 to .91. The PSS-Fa has good concurrent validity. Scores are correlated with psychological

distress and social competence. Correlations were noted with the California Personality Inventory (CPI) and interpersonal dependency. In this study, the PSS-Fa instrument was modified to explore both the relationship with their Custodial Parent and others included in that family system, and also the relationship their Noncustodial Parent and others included in that family system. (Appendix F). Verbal permission was granted by Dr. Mary Procidano at Fordham University in New York to utilize the instrument.

Procedures:

Information as to when the selected classes met was obtained. The subjects that agreed to participate in the research were given written instructions via a cover letter as displayed in Appendix B. The cover letter gave information about the survey and instruments and how to proceed. Subjects were advised that participation was voluntary and that responses would be kept strictly confidential. After completing the survey and instruments, subjects were instructed to place their questionnaire in a sealed envelope and to return the packet to the administrator. To express appreciation to the participant, attached to the survey and instruments, were envelopes containing fifty cents (.50) for a beverage of choice along with a note 'Thank you for your participation in this research study. Have a Coke on me.'

The study is a Correlational Research design. A correlational research design involves collecting data in order to determine whether, and to what degree, a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables. This design was selected to establish if a relationship exists between satisfaction with life among later adolescents from divorced homes and their perception of six coparenting influences. In this study, positive coparenting influences were defined as those family structures where the later adolescent perceives (1) financial adequacy, (2) low levels of conflict, (3) low levels of alcohol and drug use from both custodial/noncustodial parents, (4) availability of social support, (5) where custody arrangement with the noncustodial parent allow for regular, predictable, and frequent visits, and (6) where the custodial and noncustodial parent are perceived as not sad by the youth.

Data Analysis:

After all the data had been received, the demographic data were tallied and the instruments were scored. The data was then entered utilizing SPSS Statistical Software. A frequency table was derived from the data as well as correlational and regression analyses. The analyses were conducted to verify if a relationship existed between the later adolescents' life satisfaction with the independent variables of (1) financial adequacy, (2) levels of conflict within

family of origin, (3) levels of alcohol and drug use by both custodial/noncustodial parents, (4) availability of social support, (5) custody arrangement and visitation with the noncustodial parent and (6) affect of the custodial and noncustodial parent.

## Chapter IV

### Results

#### Overview

The results are presented in the following order: i) Descriptive statistics on all measures used in the study, ii) Results of a Correlational Analysis between the independent variables to the dependent variables, and iii) the results of Regression Analysis on Life Satisfaction.

#### Descriptive Statistics:

Table 3 displays the range, mean and standard deviation scores for the instruments. Given the fact that SWLS scores may range from 5 to 35 with higher scores reflecting more satisfaction with life, the results suggest that this group with a mean of 23.20 (SD=7.7) indicated higher than average satisfaction with life. Note also the results reveal greater Perceived Social Support scores of the custodial parent (PSSFac) as opposed to the Perceived Social Support scores of the noncustodial parent (PSSFanc).

*Table 3 Range, Mean and Standard Deviation on measures included in the study.*

	<u>Possible Range</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
SWLS	5-35	23.20	7.70
Conflict	3-18	11.05	4.31
Perceived Social Support			
PSS.Fac	0-20	14.49	4.59
PSS.Fanc	0-20	9.47	5.45
Finance	1- 6	3.75	1.69
Parental Affect			
Custodial	1- 6	2.80	1.59
NonCustodial	1- 6	3.05	1.81
Alcohol/Drug Use	1- 6	1.45	1.29
Custodial			
Noncustodial Parent	1- 6	2.45	1.97
Satisfactory Custody			
Arrangement	1- 6	2.64	1.85
Satisfactory			
Visitation	1- 6	3.78	1.97

#### Correlational Analysis:

In a relationship study, the scores for each variable are correlated with the scores for the complex variable of interest. Pearson product moment correlations were computed to determine the relationships between SWLS and the six independent

variables. To determine if a correlation is significant or not, the P value is compared to the alpha level (.05) . If the P value is less than the alpha, the correlation is said to be significant. If the P value is greater than the alpha, the two variables in question are said to be independent of each other. The results of the analysis are detailed in Table 4.

*Table 4 Correlations: SWLS with Six Coparenting Variables n=55*

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Correlations with SWLS</u>
Conflict (Summation: Q. 13, 14, 15)	-.105
Perceived Social Support	
PSS.Fac	.304*
PSS.Fanc	.139
Finance(Q. 12)	.256*
Parental Affect	
Custodial (Q. 16)	-.273*
NonCustodial (Q. 17)	-.386*
Alcohol/Drug Use	
Custodial (Q. 18)	-.286*
Noncustodial Parent (Q. 19)	-.293*
Satisfactory Custody Arrangement (Q. 20)	.222
Satisfactory Visitation(Q. 21)	.272*

\*p<0.05 (one-tailed)

The results revealed later adolescent satisfaction with life related negatively to conflict (Questions 13, 14, 15). The results revealed a significantly decreased satisfaction with life when the following were perceived or experienced: (1) custodial parents' sad affect, (2) noncustodial parents sad affect, (3) custodial parent's drug and alcohol problem, and (4) noncustodial parent's drug and alcohol problem. The results also revealed later adolescent satisfaction with life related positively to adequate finance (Question 12), and to perceived social support from the custodial parent (PSS-Fac). The results also revealed a significantly increased satisfaction with life when time spent with noncustodial parent was regular and predictable.

To explore significant differences in the adolescents' perceptions of their custodial and noncustodial parent, a series of dependent sample t-tests were run on (1) perceived social support, (2) parental emotional affect, and (3) alcohol/drug use. The results are detailed in Table 5. Results of the tests indicate there were significant differences in adolescents' perceptions of social support between the custodial and noncustodial parent. The adolescent perceived higher social support from the custodial parent. Further, the t-tests revealed there were significant differences in adolescents' perception of alcohol/drug use between the custodial and noncustodial parental. The later adolescent perceived the noncustodial parent as having more of a



problem with alcohol or drugs as compared with the custodial parent.

*Table 5 t-tests on variables: Perceived social Support, Emotional affect, Alcohol/Drug use n=55*

	<u>Custodial</u>		<u>Noncustodial</u>		<u>t</u>	<u>p</u>
	M	SD	M	SD		
PSS	14.49	4.59	9.47	5.45	5.859	.000*
Emotional Affect	2.80	1.59	3.05	1.81	-1.038	.304
Alcohol/Drug Use	1.45	1.29	2.45	1.97	-3.280	.002*

\*  $p < 0.05$

#### Regression Analysis

Finally a Regression analysis was conducted with life satisfaction (SWLS) as the dependent variable. The following independent variables were included: (i) Conflict (Questions 13-15), (ii) Perceived social support for custodial parent (PSS.Fac) and (iii) Perceived social support for noncustodial parent (PSS.Fanc), and three variables that were found to be significantly correlated with SWLS in the Pearson Correlational Analysis: iv) Custodial Affect (Question 16), v) NonCustodial Affect (Question 17), and vi) Visitation being regular and predictable (Question 21).

*Table 6 Regressions of SWLS on PSS.Fa, PSS.Fanc and Questions 13-15, 16, 17, and 21*

	Std. Beta	t	p
(Constant)		3.660	.001
Conflict (Questions 13-15)	.104	.751	.456
PSS.Fac	.186	1.423	.161
PSS.Fanc	.024	.165	.870
My Custodial parent seems sad (Question 16)	-.128	-.897	.374
My Noncustodial parent seems sad (Question 17)	-.323	-2.315	.025
Time spent with Noncustodial parent is regular and predictable (Question 21)	.276	1.974	.054

In this study, the regression was significant ( $F = 3.16$ ,  $p = 0.11$ ) and accounted for 28% of the variance. These findings indicate that  $R^2 = 0.284$  leaving 72% for unaccounted variance. However, the only variable that was significant in the regression analysis was related to Noncustodial Affect ( $p = 0.025$ ) (Q. 17). Question 21 approached significance.

## Chapter V

### Discussion

The results of the correlational and regression analyses support the hypothesis that there is a relationship between positive coparenting influences in later adolescents of divorce and overall satisfaction with life. The hypothesis is supported in that results of the study revealed a significantly decreased satisfaction with life among later adolescents when they perceive the custodial parent as sad and when they perceive their noncustodial parent as sad, and an increased satisfaction with life when desired time spent with the noncustodial parent was regular, predictable, and frequent. Satisfaction with Life Scale Scores were also negatively correlated with conflict and positively correlated with perceived financial adequacy and perceived social support from the custodial parent.

Findings of this research study were consistent with other research studies. First of all, the majority of the adolescents (65.5%) were found to be in the custody of their mothers. This is consistent with Silitsky's findings at 57% (1996) and Wallersteins findings in that most young people "had remained in the legal and physical custody of their mothers" (1987, p. 201). Secondly, in the area of remarriage, this study revealed that the majority of mothers (61.8%) had remarried. This result was consistent with other research results (Silitsky, 1996; Hines, 1997).

Findings were also consistent with other research relating to

psychosocial adjustment of adolescent from divorced families and psychosocial adjustment of the biological parents. (Booth et al, 1989; Hines, 1997; Glenn et al., 1995) For example, results of this research reached significant levels in terms of decreased Satisfaction With Life scores among later adolescents who perceived their custodial/noncustodial parent as sad. This finding is consistent with Silitsky's (1996) analyses with regard to "internalizing pathology was related positively to...sadness or depression in the custodial parent". (p. 163).

The results of this study are also consistent with other research that discuss the adverse effects of conflict. (Wallerstein, 1985; Glenn & Kramer, 1985; Hines, 1997; Emery, 1982; Booth et al., 1989; Hoffman, 1995; Katz et al., 1997; Kissman, 1997; Fincham et al, 1990; Borkhuis et al., 1989). Also, as the majority of subjects in this study had their mother as their custodial parent, this study is consistent with the study conducted by Amato who found that youths perceive maternal support to be dependable and constant regardless of family structure (1991).

The results do contradict the opinion of Nock (1982). In a research study done by Nock, satisfaction with life was used as one of three dependent variables in the study. Nock did not report data on the satisfaction with life variable because of the inability to account for more than 2% of the variance. The 2% of the variance in Nock's study is compared to 28% of the variance

accounted for in this study with 72% of unexplained variance. These results suggest that there are other extraneous variables that impact satisfaction with life there were not examined here. Nock concluded that "marital disruption during childhood or adolescence matters little in affecting response to questions about such things as satisfaction with friendship or family life". (Nock, 1982, pp. 37-38). On the other hand, as previously noted in Glenn et al.'s literature review, he reported satisfaction with life to be most indicative of psychological well being. (1995).

#### Research limitations

Limitations of this study must be taken into consideration when reviewing the results and conclusions drawn from them. There were several threats to the internal validity of the study. One threat to the internal validity of the study was instrumentation. The researcher made an exhaustive attempt to find an instrument that would measure the independent variables. For example, critiques reveal the instruments used in Silitskys' study including the YSR and FACES III reveal low validity and reliability. Further, that there have not been many instruments developed for this population. While the instruments utilized in this study had good reliability and validity and were tested on similar populations, there were simply too few questions to adequately measure each of the six independent variables with the dependent variable. Strong conclusions cannot be drawn with single items as measurements.

Another weakness of the research study is in the amount of confounding variables that must be considered when examining the error variance. A confounding variable is one in which the effects of the response variable cannot be distinguished from another variable. The confounding variables in this study are many and may include developmental age and sex at the time of the marital rupture but more difficult constructs to measure such as a child's level of emotional resilience (Hines, 1997) and the effects environmental influence, the association between child rearing styles and trait development, child's intellectual traits, and the impact of the child characteristics in terms of their ability to elicit responses from the parent(s) (Rowe, 1990). At any rate, the object is to minimize the error variance. The amount of variance accounted for in this study was 28% as previously stated. The 72% of unexplained variance suggests that there are extraneous variables unaccounted for and future research will be needed to unearth them.

Thirdly, an extraneous factor that may be considered when reviewing the results relates to the internal validity of the study in that the survey and instruments were administered during finals week at the University and may have had an effect on the responses as well as on the level of participation. Also, as previously mentioned, the internal validity of the study may also be threatened due to the self-report measures. Potential threats to validity include the self report measures in terms of the subject not willing to disclose the truth or be honest and accurate in their self-report.

With regard to external validity, a weakness of the study is that the sample was one of convenience and there would be an inability to generalize the test results to the general population.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should attempt to compare groups of adolescents from divorced families with a group of adolescents from nondivorced families. (Amato, 1987; Glenn et al., 1995; Gonzalez et al, 1995; Vandewater, et al., 1998) This was found to be a criticism of Wallerstein's research as well. (Chase-Lansdale et al, 1995). Wallerstein's research study offered no comparison group from nondivorced families. Another recommendation would be that the instruments used would go beyond single item measures and that there would be a better representation of ethnic populations in future studies.

#### Implications of Research

Despite the relative weaknesses of the study, a contribution has been offered in several areas. First of all, the research study contributes to the lack of research with this population, it revisits research literature and studies conducted on the issue of divorce from several decades, and it adds to the research that has targeted factors and variables related to satisfaction with life using the Coparenting Model, and it paints a more optimistic, hopeful picture of divorce at the dawn of a new century. When those predictors and factors can be more definitively and decisively tested and analyzed under more

controlled research environments, strategies may be developed in the areas of prevention, intervention, and treatment for enabling divorced parents to parent their youths in areas that would result in the most effective long range adjustment. By identifying factors and variables related to satisfaction with life, greater awareness about the potential effects of divorce may enable divorcing parents to help their children cope more effectively with this major life transition.

At the level of prevention, parents might work toward keeping their children out of their angry disagreements as the majority of the research discussed the adverse effects of conflict. Secondly, with regard to Social Support, parents might make an effort to maintain their individual relationship with their child. A family structure in which the child perceives support and connectedness may "partially buffer the child from interparental conflict" (Emery, 1982, p. 324). Laws regarding child support would continue to be enforced to ensure financial adequacy to the custodial parent and because it has been related to increased participation by the noncustodial parent.

Other prevention strategies would involve socializing males with norms that promote coparenthood especially as it relates to time spent with the noncustodial parent which in the majority of cases is the father. Trends are emerging with regard to perceptions of the father's role and the social norms that are violated when the father dismisses his responsibility. (Kissman, 1997) The results of this research study reveal noncustodial involvement that is regular and predictable as a critical influential factor in a later adolescents increased



satisfaction with life. Kissman (1997) suggests direct exposure to parenting roles for fathers in terms of experience with child rearing, skills, training, and education on child development.

Thirdly, therapist may make it an objective to keep in touch with emerging empirical literature. For example, in the Meta-analysis conducted by Amato of 37 studies involving 81,000 individuals, their findings conclude that the more sophisticated and recent the study, the more tenuous the connection between parental divorce and adult well-being. (1991). Gonzalez et al. (1995) and Glenn et al., 1995) also conclude similarly in that they surmise the absence of negative effects may relate to the increasing number of adolescents and the decreasing social stigma. Sometimes it is helpful to take the longer view.

Appendix A

Lindenwood University  
 Enrollment Summary--Ethnic Categories  
 Fall 1998  
 Office of Academic Services

	Alien	Black	Indian	Asian	Hispanic	White	Unknown	Male	Female	Total
FT/UG	134	289	14	17	47	2507	224	1371	1861	6464
PT/UG	3	8	1	0	2	114	6	239	537	910
FT/GR	59	100	5	7	7	528	70	37	97	7374
PT/GR	9	52	3	5	7	868	88	166	370	1568
Total	205	449	23	29	63	4017	388	1813	2865	9852

## Appendix B

Dear Research Study Participant,

The attached survey is being presented to you for completion in partial fulfillment towards a Master's Degree. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Should you choose not participate for any reason, you are free to do so. The information contained in your answers will be kept strictly confidential. To insure your anonymity, please do not include your name and when you have completed the survey you may deposit it in the attached manila envelope and seal the envelope. Please do not discuss your answers with anyone and try not to anticipate what you feel I would want you to say. This survey is simply a device for collecting data. This survey will take approximately 10 - 15 minutes to complete. I appreciate your cooperation and completion of the survey. Please be as honest in your self-reporting as you can.

**If you are a student whose family of origin (biological mother and biological father) are not separated or divorced do not proceed. Simply deposit the incomplete survey into the manila envelope.**

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Andrea Chrismer-Still

## Appendix C

## Demographic

1. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ M  
\_\_\_\_\_ F
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. Ethnicity/Race:  
\_\_\_\_\_ African American  
\_\_\_\_\_ Asian American  
\_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian  
\_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic  
\_\_\_\_\_ Native American  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What age were you when your parents separated? \_\_\_\_\_ years
5. What age were you when your parents divorced? \_\_\_\_\_ years
6. What were the custody arrangements?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Lived with mother  
\_\_\_\_\_ Lived with father  
\_\_\_\_\_ Joint custody  
\_\_\_\_\_ Lived with other
7. Socioeconomic Status?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Lower  
\_\_\_\_\_ Middle  
\_\_\_\_\_ Upper

8. What are the custody arrangements? Answer only if not emancipated.

\_\_\_\_\_ Live with mother

\_\_\_\_\_ Live with father

\_\_\_\_\_ Joint custody

\_\_\_\_\_ Live with other

9. Has your mother remarried?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

10. Has your father remarried?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

11. Current living arrangements?

\_\_\_\_\_ Live with mother

\_\_\_\_\_ Live with father

\_\_\_\_\_ Live with mother and stepfather

\_\_\_\_\_ Live with father and stepmother

\_\_\_\_\_ Live with mother and her significant other

\_\_\_\_\_ Live with father and his significant other.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am married.

\_\_\_\_\_ I live with significant other(s).

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

Please answer the following questions by circling the most appropriate response:

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Slightly disagree  
4 = Slightly agree 5 = Agree 6 = Strongly Agree

12. After my parents split up, my custodial parent had enough money.

1            2            3            4            5            6

13. Before my parents split up and during the two years after the separation, my parents displayed anger toward each other.

1            2            3            4            5            6

14. Before my parents split up and during the two years after the separation, one or both parents made insulting remarks about the other.

1            2            3            4            5            6

15. Before my parents split up and during the two years after the separation, one or both parents were physically abusive toward the other.

1            2            3            4            5            6

16. My custodial parent seems sad.

1            2            3            4            5            6

17. My Non-custodial parent seems sad.

1            2            3            4            5            6

18. My custodial parent has a problem with alcohol or drugs.

1            2            3            4            5            6

19. My non-custodial parent has a problem with alcohol or drugs.

1            2            3            4            5            6

20. I spend as much time as a like with my non-custodial parent.

1            2            3            4            5            6

21. The time I spend with my non-custodial parent is regular and predictable.

1            2            3            4            5            6

## Appendix D

## SWLS

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Slightly disagree
- 4 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 = Slightly agree
- 6 = Agree
- 7 = Strongly agree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I am satisfied with my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.



## Appendix E

## PSS-Fa

The statements which follow refer to feelings and experiences which occur to most people at one time or another in their relationships with their families. For each statement there are three possible answers: Yes, No, Don't know. Please circle the answer you choose for each item as it most accurately reflects your relationship with your **CUSTODIAL PARENT**.

- |     |    |             |   |
|-----|----|-------------|---|
| Yes | No | Don't know. | 1. My family gives me the moral support I need.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 2. I get good ideas about how to do things or make things from my family.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 3. Most other people are closer to their family than I am.  |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 4. When I confide in the members of my family who are closest to me, I get the idea that it makes them uncomfortable. |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 5. My family enjoys hearing about what I think.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 6. Members of my family share many of my interests.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 7. Certain members of my family come to me when they have problems or need advice.                                    |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 8. I rely on my family for emotional support.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 9. There is a member of my family I could go to if I were just feeling down, without feeling funny about it later.    |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 10. My family and I are very open about what we think about things.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 11. My family is sensitive to my personal needs.  |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 12. Members of my family come to me for emotional support.  |

## PSS-Fa

- |     |    |            |  |
|-----|----|------------|--|
| Yes | No | Don't know | 13. Members of my family are good at helping me solve problems.  |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 14. I have a deep sharing relationship with a number of members of my family.  |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 15. Members of my family get good ideas about how to do thing or make things from me.  |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 16. When I confide in members of my family, it makes me uncomfortable.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 17. Members of my family seek me out for companionship.  |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 18. I think that my family feels that I'm good at helping them solve problems.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 19. I don't have a relationship with a member of my family that is as close as other people's relationships with family members. |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 20. I wish my family were much different.  |

## Appendix F

## PSS-Fa

Please answer the same statements as it most accurately reflects your relationship with your **NON-CUSTODIAL PARENT**.

If you cannot answer these statements due to limited or no contact with your non-custodial parent, do not complete.

- |     |    |             |   |
|-----|----|-------------|---|
| Yes | No | Don't know. | 1. My family gives me the moral support I need.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 2. I get good ideas about how to do things or make things from my family.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 3. Most other people are closer to their family than I am.  |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 4. When I confide in the members of my family who are closest to me, I get the idea that it makes them uncomfortable. |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 5. My family enjoys hearing about what I think.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 6. Members of my family share many of my interests.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 7. Certain members of my family come to me when they have problems or need advice.                                    |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 8. I rely on my family for emotional support.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 9. There is a member of my family I could go to if I were just feeling down, without feeling funny about it later.    |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 10. My family and I are very open about what we think about things.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know  | 11. My family is sensitive to my personal needs.  |

## PSS-Fanc

- |     |    |            |   |
|-----|----|------------|---|
| Yes | No | Don't know | 12. Members of my family come to me for emotional support.  |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 13. Members of my family are good at helping me solve problems.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 14. I have a deep sharing relationship with a number of members of my family.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 15. Members of my family get good ideas about how to do things or make things from me.  |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 16. When I confide in members of my family, it makes me uncomfortable.  |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 17. Members of my family seek me out for companionship.   |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 18. I think that my family feels that I'm good at helping them solve problems.  |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 19. I don't have a relationship with a member of my family that as close as other people's relationships with family members. |
| Yes | No | Don't know | 20. I wish my family were much different.   |

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