Adolescents Whose Parents Are Divorced:
An Interview Study and Ethnographic Analysis

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Family and Child Development

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August, 1986

Blacksburg, Virginia

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(ABSTRACT)

Eleven adolescents whose parents were separated or divorced were interviewed regarding their experiences. Emphasis was on their positive and negative experiences and their ways of coping with their problems. The interviews of these high school freshmen were systematically analyzed using Spradley's ethnographic methodology. The 6 girls and 5 boys lived in maternal, paternal, and joint custody. Two of the adolescents had experienced death of a parent as well as divorce. The adolescents volunteered to participate in this study and were a non-clinical sample.

Contrasts were drawn based on sex, age at the time of divorce, and availability of both parents to the adolescent. Differences in maturity and responsibilities followed sexually stereotyped patterns. Age at the time of divorce seemed to have little effect on their experiences. Availability of parents was important in providing continuity and stability. If the adolescent did

not have access to both parents, other adults such as grandparents or other family members sometimes served a mediating function in the experiences of the family.

An overriding theme for all of these adolescents was the need for stability and predictability in their families. Each had experienced losses of important major relationships and changes in family patterns. These losses threatened the stability needed. Their coping efforts involved ways to increase the stability and predictability in their lives. Many adolescents thought they were more mature as a result of their parents' divorce. Some adolescents became closer to their families, assuming major household and childcare responsibilities. Others withdrew from family interaction and were very lonely. With stability in the family, these adolescents could focus on age-appropriate activities and continue developmental progress.

Acknowledgements

There are many to whom I wish to express appreciation for their invaluable help in this research. I am deeply grateful to the adolescents who volunteered to share their experiences so openly in this study and to their families who gave them permission to do so. The counselors and administration of the high school that participated in this study were consistently helpful and pleasant.

I am indebted to the members of my committee, each of whom shared their wisdom and individual expertise in such supportive ways. The chairperson of my committee, Linda Thompson, provided critical insight, clear direction, relevant knowledge, and a sense of humor at the times when each was needed.

I am especially appreciative of the support of my family. My daughters, , helped me to keep my perspective through the hard times. My husband provided unlimited encouragement and love. Thank you.

Table of Contents

Statement of the Problem

Divorce is a major life stressor to all members of the family. In the United States, the divorce rate doubled between 1966 and 1976, and, although the rate has declined slightly since then, remains at 4.9% per 1,000 population (National Center for Health Statistics, 1983, 1985). The presence of children in a family does not appear to be a deterrant to divorce. Since 1973 the annual incidence of children in newly divorcing families has remained at one million or more (Wallerstein, 1983). It is estimated that about one-third of all children will live with a divorced parent for some time before reaching 18 years of age (Glick, 1979).

Although there has long been concern about the effects of divorce on individuals, little empirical research about its consequences has been done until recently (Cherlin, 1981; Hetherington & Camara, 1984) and little systematic theory has been developed (Peterson, Leigh, & Day, 1984). Studies of the effects of divorce on children have been done since the 1950's. The early studies focused on the effects of father absence on children. Later, the focus was whether an unhappy marriage or a divorce more negatively affected the child. Neither of these areas of research yielded clear answers.

Only in the last decade have researchers begun to study these children from developmental and systemic perspectives.

Problem statement

It once was declared that divorce "damages" a child (Goode, 1956). Much of the research on children of divorce has been designed with a control group of intact families in order to confirm or disconfirm this expectation. Causality, implicating divorce as the cause of certain behaviors or developmental patterns in children, is not clearly evident, however. The complexity of divorce issues and the complexity of human development make the research questions very difficult to formulate and investigate.

It seems clear, though, that parental divorce does affect children in some way. Divorce is a process, not an event, usually requiring two to four years to regain stability following separation (Wallerstein, 1983). The changes and instability within the family at the time of separation and divorce affect a child's developmental progress, at least temporarily (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). For some children, the altered developmental progress initiated with parental separation continues to be evident 10 years later. In other words, some children do not seem to be able to

regain their developmental pattern. Other children seem to do better following parental divorce than they did in the intact family. Still others show temporary regression, then recover their normal developmental progress (Wallerstein, 1985a ; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

Problems have been seen in children who have experienced parental divorce. Anthony (1974) believed that regression in development, somatic disturbances, grief, hostility, and confusion were common but temporary findings in children following parental divorce. Other behaviors associated with divorce include "acting out" by young children and depression in older children (Gardner, 1976; Hodges & Bloom, 1984); negative perceptions of relationships with parents, especially non-custodial fathers (Fine, Moreland, & Schwebel, 1983); changes in eating habits, nightmares, and temper tantrums (Magrab, 1978); and increased psychosocial maladjustment with increased loss of time with father or with increased levels of parental hostility (Jacobson, 1978). In many of these studies, individual differences among children in divorced families were noted. Other findings indicated few differences between children in divorced and intact families. Thus, these behaviors and perceptions may be individual responses or coping attempts.

Adolescents respond in particular ways to the separation and divorce of their parents. Many adolescents

in divorced families evidence early maturity and increased assumption of responsibility (Reinhard, 1977; Wallerstein, 1984, 1985b; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Weiss, 1979). Other adolescents become proccupied with the events of their parents' divorce, neglecting more age-appropriate concerns. In some families, the parent-child roles become blurred or reversed when the single parent turns to the adolescent child for support and comfort following divorce (Kimmel & Weiner, 1985; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

Developmentally, adolescents are in the unique position of having the opportunity to modify or rework childhood experiences and problems. Because of the major changes emotionally, physically, and cognitively, adolescents have the capacity to rethink and to "remodel" previous experiences and identifications (Blos, 1962). This is consistent with the establishment of a separate identity, the major developmental task of adolescence (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents whose parents are divorced, then, are able to rethink and to achieve a more adult understanding of the changes in their family. Their perceptions of their experiences in their family and related to the divorce will affect the identity they establish for themselves. This is true regardless of the length of time since the divorce. Research evidence indicates that adolescents do this "reworking" of their

perceptions of their parents and the divorce (Wallerstein, 1985a).

In spite of the importance of divorce for adolescents and the opportunity for effective intervention at this age, there have been few studies of adolescents in divorced families. The notable exception to this is the longitudinal study by Wallerstein of 131 California children in a clinical population (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). After 10 years, most of the children are now adolescents and young adults. Findings from this study indicate that the normal developmental tasks of adolescents often are altered by divorce. Rather than a gradual increase in independence and separation from the family, some of the adolescents in this study remained very closely involved, even "burdened", with their families. Others became independent very quickly, perhaps prematurely distancing themselves from their families. Other adolescents developed maturity and responsibility consistent with their ages (Wallerstein, 1984, 1985a, 1985b).

Although no study has sought initially for positive experiences related for parental divorce, there is some evidence that these occur. Several researchers have reported that some adolescents in divorced families appear to be more mature and responsible than their peers (Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984; Reinhard, 1977; Wallerstein, 1984,

1985a). In one study, there were indications that some family subsystems were stronger and healthier following divorce (Kanoy, Cunningham, White, & Adams, 1984). Perhaps these and other positive experiences will be evident if they are sought initially in a research study.

Children, adolescents, and adults try to deal with the stress they experience in a variety of ways in order to decrease the stress and to solve the problems that created the stress. Stress comes from change, including both positive and negative changes. Attempts to deal with stress are ways of coping. Coping strategies vary somewhat according to age.

Divorce is an acute, intense stress that irrevocably and fundamentally changes an adolescent's world. It also requires a prolonged period of coping because it so completely changes the life of a family. Following divorce, the initial response is usually one of anxiety (Wallerstein, 1983). The adolescent, then, must cope with this anxiety and continue to cope with the changes that occur in the family.

Purpose of the study

Adolescents are affected by the divorce of their parents. Regardless of the length of time since the divorce, many adolescents seem to need to rework or develop a new understanding of the changes in their

family. Because of the unique developmental changes normally occurring in adolescence, there is an opportunity for intervention with this age group that can greatly influence their future adjustment. Yet, there have been few studies of adolescents whose parents are divorced. Little is known about the positive experiences that may relate to the divorce. Little is known about the ways that adolescents cope with parental divorce.

Greater understanding of the experiences of adolescents with parental divorce and their ways of coping is needed before effective intervention can be planned. It is risky to try to intervene without this understanding.

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the experiences, both positive and negative, of adolescents whose parents are divorced. Also, the ways in which adolescents cope with these experiences was analyzed. Ethnographic methods were used for analysis in order to develop contrasts of interest, based on the literature, and to allow for individual differences.

Research design

Qualitative research is one way to begin to understand these differences in the experiences of individual adolescents. The qualitative or descriptive data gathered in major studies, such as those of

Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) and Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1979), have provided much of the insight and understanding gained about the effects of divorce on children. These qualitative data were gathered in semi-structured interviews conducted months or years apart in each of these longitudinal studies. Wallerstein's study, which included adolescents, was of a clinical population.

Ethnographic methodology allows for discovery of individual perspectives and individual patterns of handling situations (Spradley, 1979). Further, the individual experiences of adolescents with divorced parents can be organized and analyzed in a systematic way using ethnographic techniques. Ethnographic methodology provides an excellent means for studying adolescents, with their unique culture and language, and the complexity of their experiences related to parental divorce.

Individual interviews with ninth-grade high school students whose parents are divorced provided information about the experiences of these adolescents. The interviews included open-ended questions about their experiences related to divorce. Also, they were asked about the ways they have coped with the problems they may have experienced since their parents' divorce. The individuals interviewed were chosen based on contrasts of sex, age at the time of divorce, and availability of both

parents following separation. The ethnographic analysis of the transcripts of the interviews revealed an overriding theme related to the need for stability and predictability. Their efforts at coping involved ways to increase the stability and predictability in their lives. There were positive experiences as well as problems that these adolescents related to parental divorce.

Review of the Literature

Research indicates that children and adolescents respond in profound and long-lasting ways to parental divorce. The importance of the developmental stage of the child and the family, the sex of the child, and the amount of time since divorce seem evident as major factors in adjustment. Another apparently important factor in the experience of the child is the quality of parenting available both before and after the divorce. Yet, these factors are not always considered or controlled for or even reported in studies of children of divorce (Cantor & Drake, 1983; Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984; Kurdek, 1981; Lowery & Settle, 1985). In general, studies indicate that children respond to the divorce of their parents in diverse ways. These responses are sometimes positive, sometimes negative, and often mixed (Cherlin, 1981; Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984; Wallerstein, 1984; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Research studies have found wide individual differences among adolescents (Fine, et al, 1983; Vigeveno & Claire, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

Although no reported research study initially has sought positive experiences of children following divorce, such experiences have been reported. Anthony states, "Although divorce is always a major upheaval in the

child's life, it should not be regarded as automatically synonymous with disaster, since on occasion it can lead to actual improvement" (1974, p. 465). Some children seem to become more successful individuals following the divorce of their parents (Gardner, 1976; Inglis, 1982).

Several researchers have described some potential positive experiences of divorce for children. Frequently mentioned is the earlier maturity and increased sense of responsibility (Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984; Reinhard, 1977; Wallerstein, 1984; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). There are indications that stronger and healthier relationships may develop within some family subsystems following a divorce (Kanoy, Cunningham, White, & Adams, 1984).

Five years after the separation of their parents, 34% of the 131 children in Wallerstein's study appeared to be doing especially well (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). These children were doing well in relationships at home and at school. Although many had been discouraged at the time of their parents' separation, they now were stable. It was noted that perhaps they were strengthened by their mastery of the stresses related to their parents' divorce. Wallerstein (1985a) described the feelings of children in her study who are doing well 10 years after divorce. These children, most now adolescents and young adults, "feel very proud that they emerged from this ordeal with greater strength than some other people have,"

(Wallerstein, 1985a, p. 132). They also described themselves as survivors, with more empathy and understanding, greater independence and responsibility. Thus, although every child said they wished they had had an intact, happy family life, they felt there had been some positive personal experiences.

Age of the child

Divorce is a crisis for a family. The family's response to divorce is mediated by the developmental stages of the system as a whole and of the individuals within the system. "The developmental particulars of each family member are shaped by, and in turn shape, the particulars of each other member's development," (Terkelsen, 1980, p. 42). Thus, the age and maturity of a child affects and is affected by the developmental stages (age and maturity) of parents and the family as a whole. Divorce impacts families differently, in part because of differences in developmental stages.

Both the age of a child and the role of that child within the family structure affect the child's response to divorce. The role of the child varies with the characteristics of all the individuals in the family, family relationship patterns, and the developmental stage of the family (Beal, 1980). In general, children seem to cope with the stress of divorce in age-related ways

(Hetherington, et al, 1979; Wallerstein, 1984; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). For example, a preschool child would be likely to use fantasy to attempt to cope with stress, while an adolescent may seek support from peers.

Children who are very young at the time of parental separation and divorce may have fewer memories of conflict and unhappiness in the home than children who are older at the time of divorce. There is some evidence that these younger children may have fewer apprehensions and be more optimistic than children with more immediate unhappy memories (Wallerstein, 1984). Children who are younger at the time of parental divorce, then, may be "less burdened in the years to come" (Wallerstein, 1984, p. 457) than children who were older at the time of divorce.

Wallerstein (1984, 1985a) found that some children who appeared to have coped well as young children with their parents' divorce, exhibited increased vulnerability during adolescence. Others, who had shown extreme stress initially, seemed to be adjusted and progressing well in adolescence. It may be that adolescents need to "rework" the issues related to their parents' divorce, regardless of the time elapsed. This "reworking" would be consistent with cognitive learning theories, with many adolescents accomodating previous learning with new experiences and broader perspectives of reality (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

"Reworking" also is mentioned by Blos (1962), who describes adolescence as a time of such extreme emotional turmoil that it offers a second chance for reworking conflicts from earlier experiences. Adolescents, then, may be a particularly important group to study since they may need to rethink their parents' divorce. Also, they typically are thinking about friendships, values, love, and romance--concerns that may be strongly affected by family relationships.

Adolescents in divorced families described themselves in a questionnaire as being more mature and more responsible than their peers because of their parents' divorce (Reinhard, 1977). These perceptions of earlier maturity and increased responsibility are similar to the findings with adolescents in other studies (Wallerstein, 1984, 1985b; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Weiss, 1979). Kalter described his clinical sample of daughters of divorced families as being "pseudomature", verbalizing the need for more independence while acting irresponsible (1984, p. 491). Jellinek and Slovik (1981) view such a pseudomaturity as a defensive reaction of adolescents to the divorce of their parents. Others view such early maturity as a response to societal pressures (Elkind, 1981, 1984). Some adolescents seek to establish intimate relationships with peers or other adults in order to meet their needs for love and affection (Wallerstein, 1985a;

Winn, 1983).

Children of different ages, then, respond differently to divorce. Both their reactions and their coping varies with age and developmental level. However, it does not appear that one age is more or less vulnerable to the stresses of divorce (Rutter, 1983).

Time since divorce

The stress of separation and divorce is both an acute crisis and a long-term process of adjustment. Many of the problem behaviors evident in children after divorce, such as increased aggression, withdrawal or poor school performance (Anthony, 1974; Gardner, 1976; Hodges & Bloom, 1984; Magrab, 1978) are considered to be responses to the acute crisis within the family. The first year following separation or divorce seems to be the most stressful and disruptive to the family and to the child. Following the second year, there are fewer indications of stress and many children begin to resume their developmental progress (Hetherington, et al, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Evidence of stress related to parental divorce continues to be present for some children, though, up to 10 years following the divorce (Wallerstein, 1985a). The adjustment of children seems primarily to be affected by the overall quality of life in the post-divorce family (Wallerstein, 1984; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

Retrospectively, college students identified periods that were most stressful for them following the divorce of their parents. These periods grouped around the time of initial parental conflict before the divorce, the time of change centered around the parents' separation and legal divorce, and the post-divorce period. Stressors cited in the post-divorce phase included relationships with stepparents, loss of time and contact with father, economic decline, and increased responsibilities at home (Luepnitz, 1979).

Economic changes and remarriage are both factors that affect families over time after divorce. The lower economic status and increased stress from financial difficulties is one of the major problems in single-parent families (Colletta, 1983; Hetherington, 1979). Remarriage is more likely to occur with the passage of time after divorce. Approximately three-fourths of divorced women and men remarry. It is estimated that one child in five will live with a stepparent for some time before age 18 (Furstenberg, Spanier, & Rothschild, 1982). These factors, then, alter the family patterns following divorce and interact with the time factor to affect children's experiences.

Sex differences

There appear to be some sex differences in response

to divorce (Biller, 1981; Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, Perry, & Mcloughlin, 1983; Hetherington, 1979; Wallerstein, 1983, 1985a). Girls especially seemed to have more difficulty during adolescence with feelings of depression related to the divorce, even if it occured years earlier, and with worries about establishing lasting relationships with men (Wallerstein, 1984, 1985a; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Hetherington (1972) observed that adolescent girls from divorced families began dating and sexual activity earlier, in contrast to girls from widowed families.

Among younger children, boys exhibit behavior problems following parental divorce more often than girls (Guidubaldi, et al, 1983; Hess & Camara, 1979; Hetherington, et al, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Two years after the divorce, the play patterns of preschool children were less disturbed than earlier, but the boys as a group continued to show more hostile and anxious behavior than the girls (Hetherington, et al, 1979). Several years after a parental divorce, fewer differences between boys and girls are seen (Reinhard, 1977; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). It does seem that behaviors of children following divorce of their parents vary somewhat according to the sex of the child and interact in some way with the age of the child at divorce and at the time of study.

There also seems to be some interaction between the

parent-child relationship and the sex of the child. Hetherington (1979) attributed some of the differences in responses of boys and girls to differences in experiences. She concluded that there is some evidence that boys more than girls are likely to witness parental conflict, to receive negative sanctions from parents and teachers, and to respond with aggression. In a study of pre-adolescent children, non-custodial fathers saw their sons more often and for longer periods than fathers saw their daughters (Hess & Camara, 1979). Also, there are more custody changes from mother to father custody for adolescent boys (Furstenberg, Spanier, & Rothschild, 1982). Thus, the sex and age of the child seem to affect parenting by both mother and father after the divorce.

Availability of parents

Studies have indicated that a primary factor in a child's experience of divorce is the quality of parenting available before, during, and after the divorce (Biller, 1981; Fine, et al, 1983; Hess & Camara, 1979; Hetherington, et al, 1979; Wallerstein, 1984; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Studies indicate that it takes two to four years following separation for men and women "to reestablish a sense of continuity in their lives" (Wallerstein, 1985b, p. 117). This discontinuity is evident in depression, self-involvement, erratic

behavior, and ineffective parenting (Hetherington, 1979). While parents are experiencing extreme stress in their own lives, they often are not sensitive to or able to respond to the needs of their children. Children may become so preoccupied with the stressful events within the family that age-appropriate concerns and individual needs are forgotten (Elkind, 1984; Hess & Camara, 1979). Marital distress is strongly correlated with behavior problems in children (Emery & O'Leary, 1982). There is "a strong connection between adequate psychological adjustment in children and the overall quality of life within the post-divorce or remarried family," (Wallerstein, 1984, p. 447). Children whose parents had unsuccessful marriages and unsuccessful divorces clearly have the most difficulty adjusting.

Biller (1981) points out that the quality of mothering may become even more important in father-absent families. Research reviewed by Biller suggests that the mother's evaluation of the divorced father, social and economic difficulties, and mother's personal competency are important factors in the mother-child relationship. Other research indicates that the affective relationships between each parent and the child are the most important variables in the child's experiences, with the father's relationship just as important as the mother's (Hess & Camara, 1979). In general, children seem to need to feel

they are loved and important to both parents, have stability within the family, and to have regular contact with both parents (Hess & Camara, 1979; Jacobson, 1978; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

In spite of the increased awareness of fathers' rights and the important role of fathers, approximately 90% of children live with their mother following divorce (Glick, 1979). Fathers, then, are most often the non-custodial parent. Non-custodial parents see their children with declining frequency over time. In one study, slightly more than half of the fathers without custody had not seen their children in over a year (Belsky, Lerner, & Spanier, 1984). Another study indicated that the remarriage of either parent decreased the frequency of contact, with a greater decrease if both parents remarried. Also, non-custodial parents in this study assumed fewer parenting responsibilities after remarriage (Furstenburg, et al, 1982). However, some children see their father more following divorce than they did prior to divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Custody alone, then, does not determine the availability of parents.

The single parent family has been described as having "a disadvantageous position in society", "characterized by a high rate of poverty, a high percentage of minority representation, relatively low education, and high rate of

mobility" (Norton & Glick, 1986, p. 16). Hill (1986) suggests that single parent families must accomplish most developmental tasks as two parent families but have fewer people in the family to accomplish these tasks, thus increasing the burdens and expectations of family members. These increased stressors within the single parent family affect family relationships, including those between parent and child.

It may be especially difficult for a single parent to effectively parent an adolescent. "The single parent, already overloaded with work, financial, and childcare responsibilities, frequently lacks the strength to enforce controls on the adolescent," (Keshet & Mirkin, 1985, p. 277). Roles of parent and child may become blurred--both may be dating at the same time, dressing in similar styles, sharing confidences and decision-making. This role confusion may inhibit appropriate limit setting by the parent. For some adolescents, these experiences may foster early maturity (Schlesinger, 1982; Weiss, 1979). Some adolescents, though, may find it more difficult to leave home, feeling the parent needs their support. This may cause premature or delayed separation of the adolescent from the parent (Beal, 1980; Kesbet & Mirkin, 1985).

If a divorced parent develops a new close relationship, the children will be affected by the changes

in the parent's behavior. Adolescents who have been close to mother or father, may feel their special relationship is threatened (Kosbet & Mirkin, 1985). Perhaps it feels to the child as though they are being "replaced", just as the former spouse was replaced.

Since approximately three fourths of divorced women and men remarry, many children will experience life as part of a stepfamily. It is estimated that one child in five will live with a stepparent for some time before age 18 (Furstenberg, et al, 1982). Visher and Visher (1979), in their extensive review of stepfamily literature, concluded that stepfamilies experience more psychological stress than intact families. Yet, there is little evidence that children in stepfamilies differ from children in other family structures (Ganong & Coleman, 1984) For adolescents, becoming a part of a stepfamily may be especially difficult. At a time when it is developmentally appropriate for the new stepfamily to become closer and more cohesive, it is appropriate for the adolescent to be loosening family ties. Sexuality issues, both between stepparents and between children in blended families, may increase tension within the family. The birth of a child in the stepfamily may have the effect of increasing or decreasing tensions in the family, depending on the individuals involved and the meaning within the family (Visher & Visher, 1979).

Adolescent coping

Adolescence is a time of rapid physical, emotional, and cognitive change. Most adolescents develop the capacity for abstract thinking. With the changes in ways of thinking and the developing ability to intellectually understand, adolescents use a variety of coping methods. Coping can be defined as the emotional or physical means that individuals use to deal with stress, both to decrease stress to manageable levels and to problem-solve. Adolescents particularly use defense mechanisms such as intellectualization, asceticism or self-denial, group identification or "uniformism", denial, anger, regression, and fantasy to help them cope. Under normal circumstances, these defense mechanisms are used only temporarily for coping (Blos, 1962).

Because of the prolonged stress of divorce and the resultant prolonged need for coping with that stress, many of the "effects" of divorce on children and adolescents represent coping behaviors. For example, the increased anger or aggression seen in school-age children or adolescents may be ways of coping. Since coping has a dual function of regulating stress and problem-solving, some ways of coping are more successful than others. A display of anger may help an adolescent get the attention needed from parents or it may create additional problems

at home or school. Variables such as age, sex, genetics, temperament, and "problem-solving skills" affect perceptions of stress and coping responses. Coping needs to be considered a process that extends over time (Rutter, 1983). Effective coping enables an individual to continue normal development.

Adolescent development

Ackerman (1980) says that three major areas of organization are being shifted in families with adolescents. These are the balance of responsibility in relationships, shifts in intensity of interaction in relationships, and increased exchange with the community. Typically, the changes in parent-adolescent relationships are gradual (Blos, 1962), and generally harmonious--"young people tend both to share their parent's values on the major issues of life and also to turn to them for guidance on most major concerns" (Rutter, 1980, p. 31). Erikson (1968) describes the central task of adolescence as the establishment of an identity. Marcia (1980) postulates that identity formation requires both a crisis of dealing with doubts and a commitment to making an individual decision, such as those regarding vocation and values. Identity formation usually is a gradual, nonconscious process throughout life. Identity formation is especially important in adolescence, though, because it is the first

time that physical, cognitive, and social development are at a level to enable synthesis of a separate identity.

In the midst of major and dramatic physical, cognitive, and social changes, the adolescent needs some stability and continuity. The ideal family of adolescents is both flexible and stable. Such a family environment allows the adolescent the opportunity to explore and to take risks, while providing a stable, predictable "protective haven" (Preto & Travis, 1985). Exploration of new experiences, new ideas, and new relationships is a part of the process of identity formation. Yet, establishing a separate identity also is marked by feelings of isolation, loneliness, and confusion (Blos, 1962). Such feelings and the actions that accompany them often create stress within a family, demanding great flexibility. These normal stresses and changes are the basis of the shifts within the family during adolescence that allow for continued development.

Divorce interrupts these normal shifts in family organization and the normal adolescent tasks of disengaging from parents and establishing a separate identity. Wallerstein and Kelly described the effects of the stress of divorce:

> It carries the potential for severely overburdening the adolescent ego in its maturational, time-appointed tasks. At the same

time, the very same situation of hazard carries with it a concomitant potential for the stimulation of a developmental spurt. . .<u>if it does not come prematurely</u>. . .may indeed even facilitate the road to independence and maturity," (1974, p. 483).

Premature accelerated development is defined as coming "before the normal detachment has begun to take place" (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1974, p. 483). It is difficult to detach normally from a parent when that parent either leaves home or becomes preoccupied with the legal, social, and emotional changes brought by divorce. Also, adolescents may become preoccupied themselves with the events surrounding divorce, neglecting their own social, emotional, and academic development (Kimmel & Weiner, 1985; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

In the divorced family, it may be difficult to make some of the shifts of intensity that occur normally. If there is only one parent available, it is difficult to express anger or in any other way create more distance in the relationship, without another parent for balance and closeness. Shifting patterns of visitation or custody create shifts in the balance of power and, thus, are likely to present increased instability or insecurity, at least temporarily (Keshet & Mirkin, 1985). One or both parents may treat their adolescent child as an adult,

turning to the adolescent for comfort and support following the divorce. The parent-child roles may become blurred or even reversed at a time when "continuing maturation would be better served by distinct parent-child roles," (Kimmel & Weiner, 1985, p. 263). Adolescents caught in this "interacting web" have greater difficulty completing normal adolescent developmental tasks (Beal, 1980; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1974, p. 504). Having the opportunities for shifting the intensity of interactions with both parents seems to enhance the process of individuation in adolescents with divorced parents (Smoller & Younisss, 1985).

Summary

Children have varied experiences when their parents divorce. Divorce is both a crisis and an on-going stressor that must be coped with and adapted to in order for optimal development to continue. There seem to be some sex differences in response, varying with the age of the child and the length of time since the divorce. The quality of parenting available and the accessibility of both parents also seem to be important to the adjustment of children. However, these factors do not explain fully the differences in experiences, either positive or negative. The individual variation in experience of similar stressors interacts with these factors to confound

reported studies.

Porter (1982) describes qualitative research methods as useful for obtaining comprehensive data about the realities of the lives of individuals. The qualitative data included in Wallerstein's study (Wallerstein, 1985a, 1985b; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980) provide some insights into the individual differences of these upper-middle class California children. However, the study design did not allow for systematic analysis of the interviews with the individual children. Also, data was collected at intervals of years, at times obscuring understanding of the changes that were observed in the children.

With the limited research available and the need to design effective interventions for adolescents of divorced parents, it is important to conduct research that will increase the understanding of individual realities and ways of coping (Wallerstein, 1983). Understanding of the perspective of adolescents--how they view the experiences they have had and how they cope with the problems they have experienced--is critical to effectively intervening when they are troubled. Researchers have described the kinds of problems they have observed or asked about in studying children of divorce (Hetherington, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Wallerstein, 1985a). Yet, with the individual variability and complexity of factors involved, a research design that allows for this

individuality and complexity is indicated. At present, descriptive rather than causal research is needed. It is important to allow subjects to describe their own problems in their own words, to discuss any benefits they may see from the divorce, and to consider the ways they cope with their problems. An interview study and ethnographic analysis of adolescents with divorced parents is appropriate for further understanding of the experience of divorce in this group.

Research Questions

Based on the literature, the following research questions were formulated.

1. What are the benefits or positive aspects that adolescents ascribe to their experiences when their parents divorce?
2. What are the problems that adolescents describe when their parents are divorced?
3. What are the ways that adolescents cope with the problems and changes that occur with the divorce of their parents?
4. Are there differences in the experiences that adolescents describe according to these contrasts:
    a. age of the child at the time of divorce,
    b. sex of the child,
    c. availability of both parents to the child?

Methodology

Research design

Eleven ninth-grade high school students whose parents separated or divorced were interviewed. Each of the informants was interviewed individually by the researcher. The interviews lasted from 40 minutes to 2 hours, with most interviews lasting about one hour. All of the interviews were conducted at the high school in a private room. No one at the high school was aware which students were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions, covering the topics of interest in an informal manner (Appendix 3).

The interviews were audio recorded. Typed transcripts were made from the audio recordings. These transcripts were analyzed by the researcher, using the Spradley method of ethnographic analysis (Spradley, 1979, 1980). The substantive coding techniques of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978) were used to increase understanding of the data. Subjective impressions of the researcher from each interview were included in the analysis. These subjective impressions included the affect, apparent comfort during the interview, and other non-verbal behavior of the informants.

The focus of the ethnographic analysis was to identify systematically the patterns in the benefits and the problems perceived by these adolescents and the ways they coped with these problems. Particular attention was given to contrasts between informants related to sex, age at divorce, and availability of both parents.

Sample selection

Students were selected to participate in the study based on contrasts of sex, age at time of separation or divorce, and availability of both parents for the child. From the literature, it appears that these are the major contrasts that affect the experiences of adolescents with divorced parents. Data on these contrasts for this population were obtained from a questionnaire distributed to all ninth-grade students in the required health classes for that grade (Appendix 1). Students whose parents were separated or divorced were asked to indicate their willingness to consider participating in the study. From this group of volunteers, the participants in the study were selected on the basis of the contrasts of interest. As indicated in Table 1, the informants selected are representative of the population of ninth-grade students whose parents are separated or divorced.

Table 1

Comparison of Population and Informant Characteristics

Characteristic	Population[a]		Informants	
	Boys(n=31)	Girls(n=26)	Boys(n=5)	Girls(n=6)
Custody				
Live with mother	12	13	2	4
Live with father	4	7	0	0
Live with parent & stepparent	12	5	1	1
Live in joint custody	2	1	1	1
Other	1	0	1	0
Visitation				
See non-custodial parent a few times a month or more	13	9	2	2
Age at Separation or Divorce[b]				
0-5	11	9	2	1
6-10	10	10	0	4
over 10 years	8	7	3	3

[a] Number of ninth-graders in required health classes whose parents are divorced out of total of 205 ninth-graders.

[b] Some informants experienced more than one divorce, although these data are not available for the population.

The informants in this study were 11 ninth-grade high school students. All of these students were 14 and 15 years old, except one boy who was 17. This boy had repeated two years of middle school. These informants were chosen based on the contrasts of interest: sex, age

at the time of separation or divorce, and availability of both parents.

Of the 11 informants, 5 were boys. Boys and girls both were included in other contrast groups. For instance, there was one boy and one girl each living in joint custody. For the contrast of age, there were 3 whose parents separated or divorced when they were toddlers or preschoolers, 4 during school age, 4 as young adolescents, and 2 in the past 6 months. Contrasts in the availability of parents were included, with informants who lived with a single parent and rarely or never saw their non-custodial parent; others who lived with a single parent and regularly saw their non-custodial parent; two who lived with a parent and step-parent, one regularly seeing his non-custodial parent and the other not; and two whose parents shared joint custody. One boy lived with his aunt and uncle.

Each adolescent informant had unique experiences following the divorce of parents. Several had experienced more than one divorce, since their parents had remarried and divorced again. Two adolescents had had parents die. One girl's father had died while she was a toddler, then her mother had remarried and divorced twice more. Another boy's parents had divorced when he was a toddler, then each of his parents had died separately before he was 12 years old. Since much of the literature about divorce

focuses on the experience of loss and/or compares the loss of a parent by divorce with loss by death, it was felt that the experiences of these 2 informants were relevant to the purpose of this study.

The high school that is the setting for this study is located within a university town in the Southeastern United States. The population in this school reflects that of the community: mainly white; university faculty, staff, and administration; semi-skilled workers in small industries; and rural, farm families. This high school is the only one within this town, with very few children attending private schools. Thus, the school students reflect the community.

Methods of data collection

An anonymous questionnaire was distributed to all of the ninth-grade students in required health classes in their high school (Appendix 1). The school administration approved the questionnaire. Students who were willing to consider participating in the study gave their name and phone number on the attached form. These names were used with the questionnaire data only for selection of students based on the contrasts indicated above. The names were not included in any other use of the data from the questionnaires. The anonymous questionnaires were used by the school to compile data on the incidence of divorce and

concerns about divorce in that school.

Students who indicated their willingness to consider participating in the study were contacted by phone. The format and purpose of the study was explained to them and to their parents, if they wished. All participants and their parents signed the informed consent letters (Appendix 2).

Each of the 11 informants was interviewed individually by the primary investigator. The interviews were audiotaped. Typed transcripts of the interviews were made and analysis was done from the typed transcripts. Subjective impressions of the primary investigator from each interview were included in the analysis.

Method of analysis

In defining the contrasts of interest, each informant was allowed to establish the time from either the separation or divorce according to which event had priority for the individual. Ages at the time of separation or divorce were grouped according to developmental stage: toddler and preschooler (less than 5 years), school age (6 to 10 years), and pre-adolescent and adolescent. Since there is direct correlation in a cohort group between the age at the time of divorce and time since the divorce, both shown to be important in the literature, a choice was made to focus on the age at the

time of divorce. Since several adolescents experienced more than one divorce, this proved to be a clear way to establish the passage of time. Availability of parent was defined as the frequency of contact between parent and child.

Ethnographic analysis using the Spradley method involves domain, taxonomic, componential, and theme analyses. Spradley (1979) defines domain analysis as a search for cultural meanings. Taxonomic analysis involves a search for contrasts within the identified domains. Componential analysis is a search for differences within and across the domains. Theme analysis involves searching for the relationships among domains and the links with the culture as a whole.

Data analysis was done using the Spradley method (1979; 1980), with additional coding techniques suggested by Glaser (1978). All data analysis and coding was done by the researcher, as mandated by Glaser (1978). Analysis of the data began with coding of the typed transcripts of the 11 individual interviews. Initial coding was done based on the domains established by the research questions: positive experiences, problems, and ways of coping. The analysis was done line by line, with repeated reading of each interview transcript. Lists were made of terms within each domain. Data were coded into as many categories or domains as possible, as suggested by Glaser

(1978). For example, an informant might say she thought a positive experience from the divorce was that she was more mature and assumed responsibility for childcare and meal preparation at home. The informant might see this as positive and also express some frustration about these responsibilities. These statements would be coded both as positive and as a problem. Any coding based on the subjective impressions of the researcher were analyzed separately and reported separately as the researcher's impressions in the results.

Taxonomic analysis focused on the similarities between terms within each domain. Repeated review of these terms revealed some similar relationships between the terms. Many of the problems experienced by the adolescent informants, for example, were kinds of losses. A parent giving up custody, moving, and losing contact with grandparents are all kinds of losses.

Componential analysis involved the search for contrasts in the data. Again the data contained in the transcripts was read line by line repeatedly to search for contrasts. The contrasts of interest were sought, as well as other contrasts that became evident during the process of analysis. At this stage, note cards were made containing brief descriptions of demographic variables related to the contrasts of interest and of terms in each domain for each informant. It was helpful to sort and

resort these cards to search for contrasts. In reporting the results, unless specifically noted, the a priori contrasts did not aid in understanding the informants' experiences.

Thematic analysis was a process of putting the pieces back together into a logical relationship or theme. This process was aided by the use of Glaser's rule of continually interrupting coding to memo ideas (1978). This process of writing memos was done throughout data analysis. As the researcher read and reread the data, ideas about relationships among the data or between the data and the literature were written in the form of brief memos. During thematic analysis, these memos formed the basis of questions about the data. Also, the process of writing brief case studies of each of the informants (Appendix 4) was helpful as another way of viewing the data and revealing patterns. Thematic analysis, then, revealed the overall themes of the experiences of these adolescents whose parents were divorced.

Results

The 11 adolescent informants in this study presented a picture of their experiences with divorce that included both positive and negative aspects. These experiences and their ways of coping with them affected their daily lives and their expectations for the future. The individual adolescent informants had had diverse experiences in their families, including recent parental separation, parental death, remarriage, and multiple divorces. Custody arrangements included maternal, paternal, and joint custody.

In spite of the diversity of experiences and circumstances, there were a number of recurrent themes in the perceptions of these adolescents. These themes related to the loss of stability and predictability within the family following separation and divorce and their efforts to regain these. Stability and predictability were not words used by these adolescents. Rather, they talked of concerns about losses of people, which created major change and loss of some stability in the family. They talked of concerns about the sadness or problems of their parents that decreased their availability and, sometimes, predictability. Also, they talked of the

security that came when a parent was "always responsible. . . .and made sure we were okay." Some of these adolescents assumed much responsibility in their families, which had the effect of giving them more predictability in their lives. For example, assuming responsibility for the laundry means knowing if there are clean clothes to wear and also provides an important daily role in the family. Such a responsibility increases the predictability and stability of daily life. When there was stability and predictability, these adolescents focused on age-appropriate concerns, such as peer activities, school, and themselves.

Most of the individuals interviewed thought there had been something good as well as some problems that followed their parents' divorce. The most frequently mentioned positive experience was increased maturity. Their concepts of maturity varied from assuming more responsibilities in the family to having greater independence. Again, the positive experiences related to the increased stability and predictability.

The adolescents in this study coped in a variety of ways with their experiences related to parental separation and divorce. The most predominant ways of coping were cognitive understanding and social withdrawal. Several other coping behaviors were used by at least one of these adolescents. All of the ways of coping seemed to be

efforts to achieve more stability and predictability in their lives.

Positive experiences

One theme predominated when the adolescent informants were asked about positive experiences following their parents' divorces. This theme was one of increased stability and predictability following the losses they had experienced. For those with relatively stable and predictable family lives, who were not burdened by increased responsibilities, their focus was on additional opportunities and increased maturity. Eight of the eleven informants thought their experiences had made them more mature than their peers. For some girls, this meant increased family responsibilities. For others, mostly boys, this meant the experience of increased freedom and independence from home. There also were several other positive domains. Divorce had increased the closeness of the relationships within the family or between custodial parent and child in a way that was positive for some of the informants. Assuming increased responsibilities or establishing closer relationships in the family are ways to increase predictability and, for some, stability in their lives. Some adolescents thought that it was positive that they had more diverse experiences and opportunities as a consequence of divorce or remarriage.

Another positive experience was the decrease in conflict between some parents since the divorce.

Increased maturity. Most adolescents interviewed felt they were more mature than their peers as a result of their experiences related to their parents' divorces. In fact, in some of the interviews, it was readily apparent that some of these 14 and 15-year old adolescents think in mature ways and assume adult responsibilities. For example, one boy believed that the divorce of his parents and, later, the death of each parent, have made him "a better person." These experiences help him cope with everyday problems, he said, and have "put things more in perspective, you know. It's not as bad as it seems and it could be a lot worse, and I think it's helped in that way." Another informant, whose mother has twice divorced, stated, "I think maybe I'm more responsible now and I know how to deal with more problems now, and most things teenagers think are important now, I don't think are as important." She said she did not worry about boys or clothes as much as her friends did.

Three of the girls, who described themselves as more mature, equated maturity with increased responsibility. Each was the oldest daughter in their families with younger siblings. Two lived in single-parent families with working mothers. The third lived with her father and

stepmother and assumed much of the household and childcare responsibilities. They described their roles as though they often are substitute mothers for their siblings. "Sometimes I wonder whether it is me who raised my little sister or my mom because we are both around her the same amount." Also, these three girls described some sense of responsibiity for their single parents. None of these girls complained that they have too much work to do. They saw themselves as having learned and grown with the increased responsibilities. One girl was respresentative of these three. She believed that the increased responsibilities she had, such as caring for her two younger sisters, keeping house, and helping her mother, had made her more mature. She was proud of what she could do. "It's hard but I done made it pretty good so far, though." This view of their experiences seemed to enhance their self-esteem, as they expressed pride in their ability to care for themselves and their families.

The two other girls who felt they were more mature did not assume major household or childcare responsibilities. The two of them are younger children in the family and now the only child at home. Both expressed some feelings of responsibility for themselves and somewhat for their parents. One said, "I'm 14 years old and I'm trying to grow up for myself. But, I mean, I try to help her [mother] all I can." Predominantly, though,

both of these girls equated maturity with being able to take care of themselves and being "able to make my own decisions."

Three of the five boys also felt they were more mature than their peers as a positive result of the divorce of their parents. One of these boys is an older brother with a younger sibling at home. Although he expressed some concerns about his brother, he did not talk of major responsibilities for childcare or desire to assume more household responsibility. He felt the increased independence had been good for him but not his younger brother. When asked if he was worried about his brother, he replied, "No, but it bothers me because I end up doing a lot of the work."

Of the two other boys in this group, one is an only child and the other is the younger child in the family. Tom, the younger boy, described the extreme closeness he felt with his older brother during the stressful years following his parents' divorce and deaths. "We would only talk to each other. . . ." Now, with less stress, they are close but "we don't need each other as much anymore" and spend more time with other friends. Two of the boys talked about some feeling of responsibility for their mothers, but they talked about this in a cavalier manner as though they were the man of the house helping the weaker woman. "You just feel like you have to train her.

'Come on, Mom, you've got to do this for us. Come on, Mommie.'" These references were to specific concerns, though, and did not pervade their descriptions of their mothers. All of the boys in this group equated increased maturity with a broader perspective about problems, greater self-assurance, and/or increased independence.

For these adolescents who felt they were more mature, it would seem that maturity is related to increased responsibilities for self, parents, home, and/or siblings. Oldest children seemed to predominate. For several, maturity also seemed to be sexually stereotyped. Girls felt they were more mature when they assumed additional household responsibilities, and boys felt they were more mature when they had more freedom and self-confidence.

There were three adolescents who did not mention increased maturity as a positive experience related to divorce. The two boys who did not mention maturity appeared more stressed during the interviews. They showed more tension in their voices and posture and expressed more emotion throughout the interviews. Craig's parents had recently separated and, unlike one of the girls, he had not been expecting the separation. Perhaps this partially explains why he seemed even more stressed. Throughout the interview, he talked of his parents and very evidently assumed responsibility for taking care of his parents. "I have had to hold everybody together."

Yet, he could not think of any possible positive experiences for himself related to the impending divorce, only positive experiences for his parents. Steve also seemed stressed and very angry at his mother and stepfather, with whom he lived, when he was interviewed. He could not think of any positive experiences related to the divorce. Divorce might have been good, Steve thought, "if I could live with my dad all the time." As it was, there was nothing good for him.

The only girl not to mention increased maturity related to divorce lives in joint custody of both parents. Although she is the oldest of three children, she said she was not very close to either sibling. She described herself as doing well academically and socially and seemed to be self-confident. She acted and expressed herself in a mature way, but she did not mention this. Perhaps with diminished stress and few feelings of increased responsibility for her family, maturity is neither a goal nor an issue for her at this time.

Increased closeness. Three girls felt that the increased closeness they experienced in their families was a positive experience related to the divorces of their parents. One talked generally of increased closeness within her whole family. The other two talked of increased closeness with their custodial parent. All

three said they doubted they would be as close if their parents had not divorced.

Jane talked fondly and proudly of her mother. Jane has experienced two divorces and many moves, as both her father and stepfather were in the military. The closeness between Jane and her mother is a positive experience for her. "I guess I have a closer relationship with my mom than a lot of people my age. . .I think I just got closer to her because I was older and sometimes she talked to me about problems."

Beth lives with her father, her two younger sisters, and, since her father's remarriage 5 years ago, her stepmother. Her mother relinquished custody at the time of separation eight years ago. She describes her relationship with her father as "very close." "We talk to each other about what's going on, you know. If we have a problem at home, we talk it out to see what we can do about it or what's gonna happen."

Trish lives with her mother and four brothers and sisters. Her father died when she was 2, and her mother has remarried and divorced twice since then. She believes her family is closer because of these experiences.

All three of these girls also believed the increased responsibilities they had at home were positive experiences that helped them mature sooner. Evidently, they all very much value home and family. With the

multiple losses each has experienced--multiple divorces, death of a parent, many moves, ambivalence about a mother who relinquished custody--perhaps the value of home and stable relationships is enhanced. Each may need the increased security and predictability of household routines and adult responsibilities. For all three girls, clearly their parents were central in their thoughts and in their lives.

The other eight adolescents did not mention family closeness as a positive experience associated with separation and divorce. Perhaps home and family are not as central in their lives or they do not perceive their families as needing their help as much. One boy described his mother as his "best friend", but he did not describe increased closeness as a positive experience, focusing instead on his hope that his parents would be reunited.

Less parental conflict. Several adolescent informants said the decrease in parental conflict was a positive experience following separation and divorce. Although some parents continued to disagree after their divorce, their adolescent children were glad they had fewer opportunities for contact. One boy described his family as "more relaxed" following the separation and divorce of his parents 4 years ago.

In contrast to those adolescents who did not mention

less parental conflict as a positive experience, those that did talked of more recent experiences with conflict. Both adolescents whose parents had recently separated mentioned the decreased level of tension at home. Also, two adolescents whose mothers had divorced for the second time in recent years mentioned the benefits of less conflict. "There was just a lot more tension in the house then, and now there isn't. . . .I'm glad they are [divorced] because we don't have to worry about what he is going to say next or if he is going to do anything. . . ." Thus, less conflict meant more predictability in the family.

Rob was the only informant who experienced divorce more than 2 years earlier to mention that he was glad there was less conflict. However, Rob described his parents as unable to "deal together". They often became conflictual when they were together, which occurred weekly with joint custody.

Adolescent informants who talked positively of the decrease in conflict between their parents had more recent or on-going experience with conflict. Conflict, even at a diminished level, seems to be a stressor for these adolescents. Such conflict is something with which they continue to try to cope. With less of the conflict that they may perceive as the basis for the divorce, these adolescents seem to have less stress from fears that

conflict will disrupt the pattern of their lives again.

More opportunities and experiences. Having more opportunities and experiences was mentioned as a positive outcome of divorce by both of the adolescents in joint custody. No other informants mentioned this. Both Rob and Susan saw the diversity inherent in living in two separate households as having some positive aspects as well as some stresses.

Rob liked the contrast in activities and lifestyle between his mother's apartment and his father's farm. "I get to see both parents. I have cable (T.V.) at my mom's but I have animals at my dad's. I live in town with my mom and I live in the country with my dad. I have work to do at Dad's and I have nothing to do at my mom's except watch T.V. It's just a nice change every week."

Susan's view of her experiences was similar. She talked of being able to go on more vacation trips each year, with her father and stepmother and also with her mother. "I get to go a lot more places cause I have a lot more relatives." Susan sees her steprelatives as "like my real family and everything and they are really nice to me." For holidays she enjoys getting more presents, gifts from each parent and her relatives. "I have a lot more."

Both of these adolescents discussed another "opportunity" that divorce and joint custody created for

them. Each talked positively of the increased freedom and decreased pressure at home because they change parents each week. Rob said, "You're gonna be going to the other place in a week. . .and that makes you feel like you can argue with it if you really wanted to. . . .On Thursday night, if your mom's starting getting on you, you can just tell her off." Susan summarized her similar attitude by saying, "I kind of get a break from each of 'em." Perhaps the normal struggle for increased independence in adolescence is less conflictual when there is a regular period of separation, as there is with these two adolescents in joint custody.

Problems

The 11 adolescent informants all experienced problems related to the divorce of their parents. Although each described the problems experienced in an individual way, these problems clustered around specific domains or categories. These domains were loss, money, increased responsibilities, stepparents, choices between parents, and schoolwork. These domains all related to loss. Each of these adolescents had lost the predictability of enduring family relationships. For all of them, parental separation and divorce meant a change in parenting patterns. For most, it also meant a change in houses, neighborhoods, friends, and economic status. The

intensity of these problems varied with each individual and, certainly, were affected by their feelings during the interview and past and recent experiences.

Loss was a major theme for all the informants. There were various kinds of losses that were experienced as problems for these adolescents. Besides the loss of an intact family, there were problems with the loss of the other parent, with frequent moves, and of the extended family. There also was loss of some economic security, loss of predictability in the families with new relationships with stepparents or the termination of relationships. Two informants had experienced the death of one or both parents in addition to divorce. Related to the problem of loss was a fear of loss. Several adolescents expressed their fears that "something" would happen to their remaining parent. In general, the theme of loss was one of loss of security and predictability in the family. There was a loss of belief in the continuity of relationships.

Each of the adolescents interviewed had experienced the loss of an intact family. One described his feelings at the time of his parents' separation. "It was like somebody had taken something precious to you away." Another described her family as ". . .pretty nice. And then it fell to pieces." Other adolescent informants expressed their loss as a wish for an intact family. This

wish was usually expressed in terms of wishing their parents had never separated or that they would get back together or that theirs was a "normal" family. One girl defined a normal family as "the way 'Beaver' is with his parents and everything." She recognized that few if any families are like this idyllic family on television, but she longed for this kind of a family. Others expressed a similar wish for a happy, intact family. Many expressed very rational reasons why they knew their parents would never remarry each other, but they wished for the family unit nevertheless.

Loss of parent. One form of loss that was a problem for some of the adolescents interviewed was the loss of the non-custodial parent. Three adolescents expressed their problems over the loss of a parent. The loss was experienced in ways that were unique yet similar.

On the surface, there are diverse experiences for these three adolescents. Beth's mother relinquished custody of her young daughters to their father and "didn't even put up a fight." Beth is close to her father and almost never sees her mother, who is a drug addict and currently in jail. Trish's father died when she was 2 years old. Her mother has married and divorced twice since then. Yet, Trish became tearful whenever she talked about her father or her wish for him. Steve lives with

his mother and stepfather, but he visits his father and stepmother for extended periods during school vacations. He talks often with his father by phone and plans to live with him during the next school year. He expressed much anger at his mother and stepfather and a strong desire to live with his father.

One commonality between these 3 adolescents is that they do not feel their non-custodial parent is available to them. It would seem that Steve has frequent access to his father, at least by phone, but he does not feel his father can intervene or influence his life on a daily basis or in the way he wishes. "It feels like I lose him all the time. It feels like I can never really have him. It's just like a coming-and-going thing." Also, as will be discussed later, Steve has a rather negative way of viewing many things in his world--from a deficit rather than a positive perspective. The other two adolescents have extremely limited or no access to their other parent, since one is in jail and the other is dead.

Other informants who also have limited access to their non-custodial parent did not mention this sense of loss. Each of these adolescents seemed to have a significant relationship with someone in addition to their custodial parent. Jane lives near her grandparents and sees them regularly. Although Tom's parents both died after their divorce, Tom and his brother are close and

have been adopted by their uncle and aunt and live with them and their cousins. Sandra said she can see her father as often as she wishes, but she has infrequent contact because they both have busy schedules. She frequently sees her older sister and discusses her problems with her. She also said her father was more strict than her mother, and Sandra values her independence.

John has had no contact with his father since the divorce when he was 11 years old. John did not express any longing to see his father. Yet, as will be discussed below, John seemed to have many unexpressed needs and appeared very depressed. It is not possible to know if John would be happier if he had access to his father.

It seems, then, that the experience of a problem with the loss of the non-custodial parent is related to the availability of that parent to the child. Also, the child's own needs for contact, own values, and the number of losses of all types seem to be factors in whether it is perceived as a problem. The availability of other significant adults may be an additional mediating factor.

Loss of place. Some adolescents have experienced as problems the moves they have made from one house, city, state, country, or school. Moving disrupts patterns of life, friendships, education, and socialization. Moving

is experienced as a form of loss, a loss of place.

For the four adolescents who said moving had been a problem for them, there were a number of other losses or changes which they had experienced. The losses associated with the move may be more of a problem because they were associated with many other losses. One girl had experienced her mother's two divorces, abuse by her stepfather in the past, and recently decreased time with her mother. Tom, one of the boys in this group, had experienced his parents' divorce, the death of both parents, and a complete change in living patterns when he moved to live with his uncle and aunt. Another girl had experienced years of parental conflict before their recent separation. Since the separation, she and her mother had moved three times in two weeks and were uncertain where they would go next. The fourth adolescent who experienced moving as a problem was Rob, who moved weekly from one parent's house to the other. He felt it was his responsibility to make the move smooth, not forgetting any of the books or clothes he would need during the coming week. His parents frequently disagreed if they were together long during the contact of the weekly move. Perhaps his real problem is not with the move, but rather with the conflict between his parents that occurs at the time of the move. Susan, the other adolescent in joint custody, also moved weekly but did not experience it as a

problem. Her parents did not have conflict over the moves or their children.

The commonality for these informants would seem to be the multitude of losses that makes the additional one of moving a problem. The other adolescents that did not mention moving as a problem had not moved as often or as recently, although most moved following the divorce of their parents. The response of parents to moving appears to be a mediating factor.

Loss of kin. Jane was the only informant to mention the loss of extended kin as a problem. Since her mother's divorce from Jane's stepfather, Jane rarely sees her stepfather's parents and other relatives. "It was really sad for me because of the fact that I, of course, met his parents and his family, and his family was really nice people, and I like his family a lot. So, I miss those grandparents." She talked with sadness about not having seen a new baby cousin. Jane does write her grandparents and one cousin. When asked if she would get to see them again, she responded, "I'm thinking about seeing them but we are afraid like if we go to see them, we may have to see him [her stepfather]." Jane seemed to have adopted her mother's fear of encountering her stepfather. Family conflict again affected the feeling of loss.

Other adolescents interviewed mentioned their grandparents and other extended family members as important in their lives. A few felt their grandparents and other kin were important and caring people in their lives, often available for talk and help. Others talked of family traditions of visiting grandparents for holidays. Tom, whose aunt and uncle have adopted him, mentioned the problem of conflict over choosing which set of grandparents with whom to spend vacation time. Craig spoke of having to "let go" of his relationship with his grandmother in order to concentrate on helping his parents following their separation. John told sadly of the recent death of his grandmother and the growing senility of his grandfather. Thus, although grandparents and other kin were not perceived to be "replacements" for parents or any other losses, they sometimes played an important role in the lives of these adolescents. Grandparents and other extended family members can be important mediating factors in the sense of loss experienced by these adolescents.

Fear of loss. Several of the adolescents interviewed expressed a fear of loss, a fear of "something happening" to their single parent. Their fear was that they would lose that parent to death. This fear seems to occur with no basis in reality, or, at least, the adolescents said they knew their parents were healthy and

were careful drivers. Yet, these fears persisted for four of the adolescents such that they talked about them during the interview.

For each of these adolescents, the fear of loss was real enough that they obviously had given much thought to the possibility. Each of them initiated discussion of this concern during the interview. Each had carefully thought about the probable ways that their parent would be hurt. For example, Jane had thought of many possibilities. "Because she [her mother] doesn't drink and I think she is not about to get in a drunk driving accident or anything, and she is a safe driver, and so I don't think she is going to kill herself or anything. So there's not that much chance that she is going to be killed, either, because I don't think there are many people to even dislike her." Even with this careful reasoning of the small chance that her mother will die, Jane, like the others, still worries and mentioned her fear several times.

These adolescents all shared a fear of death, another major loss. Death already has had some impact on each of them. Two of them have experienced the death of a parent. One said he had no such fears about death until after his parents died. Another had two uncles die in recent years. The mother of the fourth adolescent recently became concerned about her children in the event of her death and

began writing her will. She took the children to meet their father in another state, since they had not seen him since the divorce nine years earlier. The visit did not go well. This adolescent still worried about "what would happen if your mother died, how know, being that she is not married again. . . .I try not to think about that because I don't want it to happen. . . .I guess I should think about it as it would help in that you need to know what you are going to do."

Thus, each of these four adolescents has had the concern or the reality of death in their own lives, which probably precipitated their fears of further loss by death. It was striking how pervasive that fear was for two girls who mentioned it several times throughout their interviews. These two girls already have assumed much responsibility for their families. Death would greatly increase those feelings of responsibility but give them little authority at their relatively young ages. The other adolescents in the study did not mention any experiences related to death. They also did not express fear of loss through death.

Limited money. Six of the eleven adolescents interviewed mentioned money, or the lack of money, as one of the problems they experienced as a result of their parents' divorces. Rob, Trish, John, Craig, Jane, and

Cathy all said they wished their families had more money. They all wanted age-appropriate things, like more clothes and money for the movies or activities with their friends. Rob and Cathy both recognized that money had been a problem in their families before the divorce or separation. Yet, they both felt it was even more of a problem now. For John, Craig, and Jane, money had not been a problem before their parents separated but was now. Money seemed to be a simple problem for them to define--there was not enough of it. Jane and Trish talked of ways they tried to help out. Jane tried to think of activities with her friends that did not cost much money. Trish assured her mother that she did not need to come see her play in all of her basketball games, since admission was charged. John has worked since his parents' divorce when he was 11 years old. Only John mentioned his responsible approach toward money as a sign that he was more mature. At 17, John was the oldest of the informants. For the others, at 14 and 15 years of age, there seemed to be little thought that they could directly affect the money problem in their families.

Difficulty of taking responsibility for parents. Four of the adolescent informants discussed their feelings of responsibility for their parents as a problem for them. None of them directly stated that their parents were their

responsibility, yet each discussed in many ways their feelings of responsibility and the feelings of being burdened with that responsibility. Cathy and Craig, both in the first months of parental separation, expressed these feelings most strongly.

Each of these adolescents was ambivalent about their perceived responsibility. Sandra sounded very ambivalent about her feelings towards her mother and her responsibilities for her mother. She talked about the conflict between the two of them, then more fully described the dilemma she feels.

> "A lot of people think I'm pretty mature for my age and Mom still doesn't want to leave me alone by myself but. . .she doesn't want to let me go anywhere to do anything, cause she doesn't want to be alone by herself. . . . I like to do things with my Mom sometimes, but the majority of the time, I want to go with my friends. . . .it hurts Mom, which I can understand that. But, I mean, I can't be with her all the time. . . ."

Sandra feels her dilemma is worse because she is the youngest child and there is no one else at home but her and her mother.

John also expressed his concern that his mother needed "somebody she could talk to." John has tried to

listen, but "she won't talk to me." When asked what bothers his mother, John said she worries about him and what is going on with him. Yet, they do not discuss this directly. Sandra's mother also worries mostly about her, and they continue to have conflict.

Cathy's parents physically separated just 2 weeks prior to the interview. She said she has known for months that they were going to get a divorce and has wished that they would separate for years. Cathy said that she feels she had to "take care of" her mother and father and be the "main communication" between them. Cathy's ambivalence about her position between her parents is evident. "Him [her father] expecting me to handle his marriage is not normal. It's just not something I, I want to do. If I could do it, I would, but there's nothing I can do." Cathy thinks the separation and divorce will help free her from responsibility for her parents. She played a central role in the actual separation by running away from home, successfully achieving her goal of having her mother move out in order to get Cathy to come back.

After four months of separation, Craig still hopes his parents will get back together. He is working very hard to achieve that. He has persuaded his father to send his mother flowers, take her out, and begin decorating the family home which his mother left. He talks at length with his mother about the possibility of her returning.

Yet, he feels unsure that a reconciliation is the right answer for his parents. "I'm really trying to get Mom and Dad back together. She's sort of gone along with the idea but we are still afraid that he is gonna change." The strain of this responsibility has affected his school work, his appearance, and his relationships. "I'm gonna try to get my life together and I'm gonna try to pull everybody together in the process."

These four adolescents, then, see themselves as having many responsibilities in their families. Often, they sound as though they are parenting their parents. Whatever the reality, these four felt their parents needed their help.

Problems with stepparents. Each of the three adolescent informants who live with stepparents described problems in their relationships with them. Two others had lived with stepparents in the past. Those relationships ended in divorce with no current contact.

For the three adolescents who mentioned problems with stepparents, there seemed to be a feeling that the stepparent was an intruder in the family. This was less evident when the stepparent had been in the family since the adolescent was a young child. Two of these adolescents had lived with stepmothers for five years or less. Each of them expressed some discomfort with their

stepmothers, especially when they feel she is "acting like a mother." One of these adolescents, Susan, lives in joint custody, with alternate weeks spent with her mother and her father and stepmother. She compares the two of them. "At times my stepmother gets on my nerves. You know, I guess I compare her with my mom but that's cause my mom gets on my nerves. So, I don't know." Susan recognized that her mother and her stepmother were quite different, that her stepmother is more "wifey" than her mother, and that her stepmother is more organized, which is closer to Susan's own patterns. Susan finally concluded that the problem was that she did not know her stepmother well enough to be really comfortable or open with her. "I don't think I have ever yelled at her. . . .It's kind of like I can't because I don't know her well enough." Their relationship, then, is just rather distant. "We get along and everything but it's just more like I get along with an aunt that I didn't know that well or something."

The third adolescent in this group had lived with his mother and stepfather since he was 6 years old. Several times during the interview, he referred to his stepfather as "Dad", differentiating between him and his father by calling his father "my real Dad." Steve frequently referred to his mother and stepfather as "my parents." He expressed a lot of anger toward both his mother and

stepfather. He did say that his stepfather "kind of rules everything and he makes. . .them [the rules]. You know, if he had never come around, I wouldn't have to worry about anything." Later in the interview, though, Steve said he was not sure that his life would be much different if his stepfather was not there because he was not sure that the rules did not really come from his mother and were just supported by his stepfather. Thus, Steve seems to have more fully integrated his stepfather into his concept of family, perhaps because his stepfather has been a part of his family for so long.

Problems with stepparents were discussed by all adolescents living in stepfamilies. For two of the three, remarriage had occurred within the past 5 years. Thus, they had to adjust to this new relationship during preadolescence. Steve, in contrast, had lived with a stepfather for almost 10 years and did not seem to think of him as a stranger, in the way the others had. All three seemed to feel it was important to state that their stepparents were different than their same sex natural parent. Even Susan, who seemed to like her stepmother, felt distant towards her, as though somehow she could not get to know her better. Each of these adolescents seemed to feel the loss of their parent and were uncomfortable with any replacements or any change in family patterns.

Problems in school. Two of the adolescents interviewed spoke of having problems with their school work during the time of their parents' divorces. John did not pass 2 years in school about the time of his parents' separation and divorce. John also was using illegal drugs heavily at that time, which certainly must have influenced his school work. He says he is doing better in school now and plans to complete high school even through he will be 18 this year and in the 10th grade.

Since his parents' separation a few months ago, Craig has had a hard time concentrating on school. He was taking exams at the time his mother actually moved out of the house. "Since I have had to hold everybody together. . . .work in school has gotten really low." "I'm hoping that if they get back together, then I can start fresh over next year and really make my grades go up."

Cathy, whose parents separated recently also, has missed school several days in the past 2 weeks. The confusion and frequent moves has made even getting to school difficult. This is unusual for her and occurred in spite of her parents' high value for education.

Two adolescents, Rob and Jane, said they maintained high grades even during the period following their parents divorce. In both their families, good grades are important, and they received positive attention from their

parents for those grades.

For the adolescents whose school work has declined, there seemed to be confusion and lack of stability in their lives immediately after their parents' separation. School attendance declined even when the family put high value on education. Thus, priority and attention to school performance is a factor in school work, but it is affected by other factors such as the level of stress in the family and the individual's way of coping with stress. Some individuals coped by giving increased attention to school work, where success and parental praise were likely. Others, such as John, may cope in ways that add to their problems. For those whose school work and attendance declined with parental separation, there was a loss of the predictable pattern of school and of the possible stability or successes it might provide.

Problems in choosing between families. Tom was the only informant to mention making choices between families as a problem for him. Both his maternal and paternal grandparents want Tom and his brother to spend holidays and summers with them. He feels these forced choices are difficult, that there is no way to make everyone happy. He continues to try, though.

Other informants that had to make choices did not mention them specifically as problems. Sandra was given

the choice of which parent to live with at the time of her parents divorce 6 years ago. She believed that either parent would understand and accept her choice, thus she did not view the choice as a problem. Cathy, whose parents separated just 2 weeks ago, was not given a choice with which parent to live. She did have to choose whether or not to visit her father. She did not feel that her choice would cause more conflict between her parents. Thus, it did not create a problem for her. Choices seem to create problems for these adolescents when the choices seem to be between those that they love, with no way to avoid hurting someone. Such choices, perhaps, raise the spectre of further loss when someone feels hurt or rejected. When they believe their choices will not create ill will, then the choices do not seem as problematic.

Problems Evident to Researcher

The problems previously discussed were those mentioned by the adolescents during the interviews. There also were problems that seemed to be implied in what was said or that seemed to be problems or potential problems from a developmental perspective. It is very difficult to assess normality in adolescents. As Blos says, "A normative assessment of adolescents must. . .be vague and incongruous" due to the "high degree of plasticity" and "complex phenomenon" of behavior characteristic of this

age (1962, p. 9). Thus, problems were seen only as potential problems in that they were not typical behaviors or concerns for this age or they were indicative of possible psychopathology. For example, many of the adolescents interviewed saw themselves as being more mature than their peers. This early maturity may indeed be a positive benefit for them following the divorce of their parents. However, it also may mean that they have had little time for being a child. It is not known how much time for childhood activities is needed for optimal development. Have these adolescents had the time they need to develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally into the adults they so closely resemble?

The problem of early maturity and adult responsibility is one that may be seen as only a potential problem. Although clinicians speak of the problem of pseudomaturity, there is no generally accepted criteria to define the problem specifically. Among the adolescents interviewed, three of the girls appeared to have taken on some very adult responsibilities for housework and child care. "Sometimes I wonder whether it is me who raised my little sister or my mom because we are both around her the same amount, as if we both have an equal amount of. . .whatever made her the way that she is." Yet, all three seemed to be very close to the parent with whom they lived. From some of their descriptions of their

experiences, it seemed that they had not yet fully separated their own identity from those of their parents. Thus, it may be that their responsibilities were not consistent with their levels of real maturation, if maturation is considered a process of identity formation.

In a very different way, Sandra and John may have matured early. Neither of them likes to be at home, staying away as much as possible. Both have friends who are older and participate in their activities. Each is involved in a close heterosexual relationship, but neither felt they could fully trust this friend. Both are ambivalent about their perceptions of their mothers' needs for their help and the conflicts between them. Sandra and John each have had legal problems--running away from home for one and illegal drugs for the other.

These adolescents did not feel that they had grown up too fast. When asked, Jane said she sometimes acts "weird" and watches cartoons occasionally. "I think everybody sometimes needs to act a little childish and it makes it easier, I think." Beth said she probably missed some of her childhood because she grew up so soon. "But, I got to do things, maybe not as much, but I did them." John believes that his problems related to home will be solved when he moves out this summer when he is 18.

Another problem, perhaps related to the one of early maturity, is that of the parent confiding in the child as

though the child were an adult. Several of these adolescents knew "secrets" that they did not need to know. Such secrets may place an unnecessary burden on the developing adolescent.

Secrets told these adolescents included the knowledge of a planned divorce or separation before the spouse knew of it. Jane, Cathy, Beth, and Craig all were told of one parent's plan for separation before the parent told his partner. Tom also was told of a planned custody change by his father. His father revealed to Tom and his brother the secret arrangement between him and his ex-wife that set the criteria for the father to obtain custody of his sons. This secret created a further rift between Tom and his uncle and aunt, with whom he lived. After the secret was revealed, the relationship improved. Such alliances within a family do not enhance a functional family heirarchy or improve family relations. Rather, knowledge of adult secrets, especially between parents, gives the adolescent adult status and power for which they may not be prepared.

The problem of loneliness seemed to be apparent in two of the adolescents. John and Sandra seemed to view the world as though they were all alone. In contrast to the other adolescent informants, both John and Sandra often used the pronoun "I" instead of "we". Both of them have conflict with their single parent. Neither feels

they can confide in their parents or friends. Sandra does talk with her older sister and brother. As will be discussed below, Sandra does not appear to be as deeply sad as John. Yet, both sounded very lonely.

Several of the adolescents appeared and sounded very sad. Trish and Sandra both appeared very sad. Trish cried softly throughout the interview and said she often feels very sad at home. Sandra sounded very lonely and sad. She described a lifestyle that may serve to further isolate her. She also talked of feeling "really, really hurt" sometimes, when she will "just cry and cry and cry and cry and cry." Sandra appears rather "tough", as though little in the world bothers her. It may be hard for her, then, to get the help she wants when she is really hurt.

Some adolescents evidenced some of the signs of clinical depression, such as flattened affect, depressive thoughts, withdrawal from activities, lack of pleasure in life, and suicidal thoughts (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Craig, Cathy, and John all seemed to be depressed. Each of them appeared sad, had many negative thoughts (though, this could be a function of the general topic of the interview), had withdrawn from some of their usual activities, and seemed to have little pleasure in life just now. Both Craig and Cathy were in the first weeks and months after their parents'

separation. Both of them were preoccupied with their parents and the changes in their lives. Craig presented a classic picture of depression. ". . .work at school has gotten really low, and I used to be so careful of the way I would dress and the way I looked and now I don't even care. I just look terrible. And I have been trying to get it all together but, I mean, it's just so hard." The period following separation has been called a crisis period. Both Craig and Cathy seemed to be going through a crisis, when their predominant thoughts were focused on the immediate problems at hand--helping their parents and themselves reestablish stability. Cathy currently is seeing a therapist. Craig was encouraged to seek counseling and given the names of counselors.

John appeared to be more depressed than any of the other adolescents interviewed. His parents separated when he was 11 and he now is 17 while in the 9th grade. John said he sometimes feels depressed, for which he goes to sleep. Several years ago John attempted suicide with a drug overdose. He denies suicidal ideation now, saying "Life's too short." John did say that "All my friends are dying," referring to recent deaths of two acquaintances. John also was urged to seek counseling.

Ways of coping

Each of the adolescents in the study coped with the

problems experienced in an individual way. As a group, though, these 11 adolescents shared many ways of coping. Successful coping enables an individual to continue with normal, age-appropriate development. The various ways of coping provided some means of attempting to gain some predictability and stability in the lives of these adolescents.

Cognitive explanations. The one coping method used by all of the adolescents interviewed was a cognitive attempt to make sense of what had happened in their family. Each adolescent offered explanations about the divorce, such as "My mom and dad are a lot different and so I don't even see how they got along before [the divorce]." For three adolescents whose parents were separated more than 10 years ago, when they were less than five years old, explanations about the divorce or separation were not mentioned. Rather, they explained in a cognitive way how the separation affects their lives now and how they deal with it. Again, they tried to make sense of what has happened to them.

These adolescents seemed to make sense of divorce that followed parental conflict, lack of love, or growing apart. Divorce following an affair or drug abuse also was understood. Some of the explanations volunteered by these adolescents were egocentric. For example, Jane said her

mother divorced her stepfather, after five years of marriage, when she learned he was abusing her children. "When my mom noticed this happening, she decided they should be separated because she didn't want that for us. So that is why that divorce happened." Understanding of the reasons parents divorced did not necessarily convey approval of the divorce.

When their parents had recently separated, the adolescents were very caught up in the immediate events. Without the perspective of time and with so many uncertainties in their daily lives, Craig and Cathy talked of their parents' separations in convoluted, detailed stories of recent events. Their views of these events seemed to alternate between fatalistic acceptance and active efforts to help their parents make the right decisions. Cathy said of her family, "There's no way we could have the all American happy home because of, you know, all the water under the bridge. . . ." Within the same minute, she also said, "If I could do it [make their marriage work], I would, but there's nothing I can do." Craig expressed even more ambivalence, seeming to be weighing all of the benefits or deficits of their marriage for each of his parents. He had not weighed these for himself. In the acute crisis, then, these adolescents tried to cognitively understand the changes occurring, but they were too caught up in the events to organize and

distill them.

Sometimes the attempts to cognitively understand their parents' divorce were not yet clear or congruent, even with the distance of years. John especially expressed a need to "really know" what had caused his parents' divorce 5 years earlier. He talked about his father's gambling, staying away from home, and an affair about which his mother had told him, yet he several times said that he feared he might really be the reason his father left. "I feel like I'm mostly to blame. . . .I was a real pain when I was young." John has no contact with his father and, so, no knowledge of his father's view of the divorce. For John, as for the others, it is important to understand in a cognitive, rational way what happened to his family. Of the 11 adolescents interviewed, John seemed the most uncertain of an explanation for the divorce and the most troubled.

These adolecents tried to cognitively "make sense" of their parents' divorce. Perhaps through attempting to understand the reasons for the disruption of their family, they hope to gain more control of their own lives. They used their increased cognitive skills to gain more power or control in their own lives. Although some had lived in a divorced family for most of their lives, they continued to try to understand what had happened and why.

Future plans. When asked how the divorce of their parents would affect their futures, the informants responded with both specific and general ideas. The responses often indicated previous thought. For some, the responses indicated efforts to plan for their futures and to avoid the problems they anticipated, based on past experiences.

Many of these adolescents thought the experiences they had had would help them in the future. Several thought their greater maturity now would help them avoid some problems in the future. Others felt they had learned how to avoid some mistakes. Jane, who described herself as more mature and responsible than many of her peers, thought these qualities would help her. "I will be able to decide what I am going to do and go on and do them instead of just kind of trying to find myself."

Others were more pragmatic about the future. Rob thinks he will have to work his way through college, since his parents' divorce increased financial concerns in his family. Cathy thought she had difficulty resolving conflict, often acting as her parents did. She was determined to change this problem in the future.

Several adolescent informants expressed their concerns about marriage in their future. Some were cautiously optimistic about marriage. Others were doubtful they would ever marry. One said he could not be

certain if he had found the "right girl" because "we don't know what the future lies ahead." Others had tried to understand why their parents' marriage did not last, so they would not make the same mistakes. This sometimes created an unusual view of marriage. "I don't know if I want to get divorced when I get married." This perspective was echoed by another who closely connected marriage and divorce. "If I get married and then get divorced and then get married, I will have to make sure the second one is right." This was said by Jane, who is hoping her father will divorce his second wife. A couple of girls stated they do not plan to marry at all. One did not want to marry because if she divorced "it must be hard on the kid." Each talked about being her "own person" and having more freedom for travel and career plans if unmarried.

Considering future plans, then, seemed to be one way of coping for these adolescents. It seemed closely connected to cognitive efforts of "making sense" of what had happened in their families. If they had problems in their lives in the present, their plans for the future increased their hopes for a better life. The specific plans they had reflected their own experiences, maturity, and values.

Social withdrawal. Many of the adolescents

interviewed used social withdrawal as a means of coping, another typical adolescent coping pattern. For most of the informants, this social withdrawal took the form of spending time alone, usually in their own bedrooms, whenever they are especially stressed. Sometimes, they further isolate themselves with music. One girl left the house to go for walks when she felt sad "because I don't want my mom to see." None of them mentioned the time alone as being a problem in their families. It seemed to be an effective way for them to cope with some stress.

Other forms of withdrawal also were used. Some adolescents spent a lot of time with friends, staying away from their own homes. One boy, John, said he sleeps a lot when he is stressed. In the past, John has used drugs as a way of withdrawing from his problems, "That [drugs] was only an excuse to get out." Three of the informants had run away from home. One was away for only a few hours, the others longer. Steve was the only one who planned to run to his non-custodial parent, but he returned home after a few hours, realizing he could not travel the many hundreds of miles.

Craig used social withdrawal to help him cope with the extreme stress of his parents' recent separation. He talked of his feeling as though he had to take care of his parents and try continuously to get them back together. "So, I've had to let go of my brother and my

grandparents," feeling that he cannot keep up social relations with them, too, just now.

For most of these adolescents, then, social withdrawal into their own rooms was an effective way for them to handle stress, especially family stress. For some, though, going to their rooms was not enough. They used other forms of withdrawal from the family, such as staying with a friend, sleeping, or running away. Withdrawal seemed to be an effective way to avoid, at least temporarily, some stressful situations.

Talking. All of the adolescent informants used talking to another person as a way of coping. Some talked with their parents. Only Steve, who does not get along with his mother and stepfather, talked to his non-custodial father. All others talked with their custodial parent. A few described their mother as a "best friend," while others felt their parents could only have limited understanding of their problems. A couple of informants talked mostly with their siblings. Most talked with friends.

There was an interesting contrast between the girls and boys in their patterns of talking to others. The girls talked about personal concerns with friends more than boys did. Most girls talked with friends, although a few talked mostly with their mothers. One talked with her

older sister. Of the boys, two talked with their fathers, two talked with their girlfriends, and one talked with his mother. Overall, the girls mentioned talking more often than boys as a way they cope with stressors.

Five of the eleven adolescents interviewed had been in counseling. Two thought the counseling had been especially helpful for them in learning to deal with their problems. The others did not mention counseling as being especially helpful or not for their current stressors. Talking may be a way to gain increased understanding and to decrease stress by expressing concerns to others and receiving their responses.

Activities. Several of the adolescent informants used activity to cope with stress. Although others may participate in numerous activities, they did not mention activities and interests as a way to help them cope or relax. Church activities and sports were mentioned by four of the informants. They said either that they felt good while doing these things, enjoyed being with the others doing these activities, received parental praise for their participation, and/or used the activity to "let off steam".

Three of the boys mentioned writing as a way they worked out problems. Steve and Tom keep diaries or journals that they write in periodically. Both boys began

keeping these years ago at the urging of their fathers. John writes poetry when he feels especially stressed or moved by some event or person. Since boys talk less with others about their problems, they may use writing to express themselves.

Denial. Denial also was used as a coping method. Three adolescents said they had little or no memory of their family before their parents separated and had no memory of the actual separation, even when directly questioned. These adolescents were 6, 9, and 10 years old when their parents separated. Most children have some memory at these ages, even if not continuous memory, especially of significant events. It is possible they did not wish to discuss these memories or that they did not wish to think of a difficult time in their lives. Again, this gave them control over the events about which they had to think or talk.

Of note is the apparent absence of denial by these adolescents in discussing family situations. There seemed to be congruity between what was said at one time and another about the family or specific situations. Often ambivalence was expressed about certain feelings or situations. However, there did not seem to be any denial of the perceived reality, as, for example, expressing unfounded hope that everything would be just fine soon or

their parents would decide to remarry. Craig, whose parents suddenly separated several months earlier, did express strong hope for his parents' reunion, but this hope seemed to be founded in some reality.

Several of the informants told of times they used denial with friends or in school. For example, Susan told no one--friends or teachers--about her parents' separation. Knowledge of the divorce came out only a year later when she began unexplained crying at school. Other informants said they discuss their parents' separation or divorce with very few friends, most often with a best friends whose parents also are divorced. Boys, more than girls, seemed to deny to others the reality of their parents' separation or divorce.

Anger. Several of the adolescents expressed a great deal of anger at their parents and their life situations. Some anger was mentioned by most of those interviewed. Tim, Sandra, and John, however, expressed anger to a marked degree. Each of their parents divorced between 5 and 11 years ago. Tim had received his report card just prior to the interview and had not done as well as he had hoped. His anger may have been heightened by this. All of his anger for 90 minutes was directed, though, at his mother and his stepfather. He did not differentiate between the two of them and expressed many

long-standing resentments.

Sandra and John were less overt in their expressions of anger. Both seemed to feel somewhat burdened by their mothers, both of whom were described as depressed and worried about their children. Both Sandra and John had had some problems with school and the community, perhaps associated with overt expressions of their anger. Both of them lived in poorer sections of town and had had a major move, following the divorce, from more rural areas to the university town. Both, though, described the move positively. Somehow, their efforts to cope were now funneled into anger primarily. Yet, the fact that they volunteered to participate in this study showed that they were still willing to talk.

Individual philosophy. Throughout the interviews with these adolescent informants, it was evident that each had an individual view of the experiences they discussed. These individual perspectives certainly affected the way they experienced and responded to the events in their lives. For some, the perspective they expressed seemed to be developed into an individual philosophy that helped them interpret their experiences. Several informants expressed these views as direct quotes from their parents. Yet, with the millions of words spoken to them by their parents, they chose to remember and use these. Others did

not give attribution to their philosophical statements.

Two boys provided contrasts of these personal philosophies. One boy, Steve, seemed to view everything from a very personal, rather negative perspective. He wanted very much to live with his father. If he could not do that, nothing was good and there was nothing that could be done about it. He has lived with his mother and stepfather for about 10 years. For whatever reasons, he perceived that he had little power to change or influence the events in his life. He described himself as feeling "trapped".

In contrast, another boy said, "I always try to look for the bright side of things." This boy, Tom, had experienced the divorce of his parents at a similar young age as Steve. Tom also had experienced the death of each of his parents. He does seem to be happy now, living with his aunt and uncle, who have adopted him. Although Tom talked about the difficulties he had experienced, he also said he feels he is a better person for all that has happened. The events of his life have helped him "put things more in perspective, you know, it's not as bad as it seems and it could be a lot worse. . . ."

The individual view of each of these adolescents affected their responses to the experiences they had with divorce. One girl, for example, seemed happy and well-adjusted, yet she very much wanted a "normal family".

She did not view her family, with divorce, remarriage, and joint custody, as normal. Another girl, who had assumed a lot of responsibility at home, expressed a philosophy she attributed to her father. "If you take on the responsibility, just do the best you can. I handled it [the divorce] well, the next person may not." There seemed to be no pattern or evident contrasts related to the philosophy each of these adolescents had developed.

Other coping methods

Several other coping methods were described or used by the adolescents during the interviews. These methods include high achievement in school, regression, and fantasy. These ways of coping are less commonly used by adolescents in general and were used by fewer of the adolescents in this study.

Two adolescents, Rob and Beth, proudly mentioned in the interviews that they had maintained high grades in school throughout the stresses in their families. Both of them received praise and recognition from their parents for their achievements. Also, they both seemed to feel very positive about themselves in this regard. In each of their families, school achievement was given high priority.

Trish and Craig both used fantasy when discussing the future, perhaps as a way of coping with a present that is

difficult. Both felt very responsible for their parents and were concerned about the financial difficulties their families are having. Both fantasized a future with money and power. Each of them planned to use their money and power to gain control of their own lives and to give lavish gifts to their parents. Trish says in her future, "I would like to be able to go everywhere and travel and you won't have to worry about family." Craig, who plans to go into show business, plans to own an expensive sports car and to buy each of his parents a mansion, "or just buy 'em one great big one, if they get back together." Although these plans possibly may be realistic for either Trish or Craig, they are using these fantasies of a better tomorrow to cope with difficult todays.

Craig, whose parents separated recently, was the only informant who clearly used regression as a way to cope. He even seemed to be conscious of doing this. He rather poignantly described going to his grandmother's attic to find some of his old toys, "To sort of make myself see what all that I've been missing while trying to worry about them (his parents)." With the extreme stress Craig has been experiencing, he may have needed to use many ways to cope, including the use of fantasy as he was when younger and life, perhaps, was simpler.

Discussion

The lives of the adolescents in this study were affected in profound ways by the divorce of their parents. There were both positive and negative experiences that each of them associated with the divorce. Each had developed ways of coping with these changes, ways that sometimes did not enhance their developmental progress. There were themes evident through the experiences of all these adolescent informants, with notable individual differences.

The predominant theme evident throughout the positive and negative experiences and the coping efforts was that of the desire to increase predictability and stability in the lives of these adolescents. The separation and divorce of their parents had changed the fundamental relationships within their families. Stability within the family was shaken. Daily patterns of life became unpredictable, at least temporarily, and for some remained unpredictable.

Several research studies have indicate that it takes 2 to 4 years after marital separation for adults to reestablish continuity in their lives (Hetherington, et al, 1979; Wallerstein, 1985b; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). During this time, there usually is discontinuity or unpredictability in the parenting role. Thus,

children, who depend on their parents for much of the stability in their lives, experience the loss of parental predictability during this time. The current behavior of a child is related more to the current stability of parents and lifestyle rather than past experiences (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

This was true for the 11 adolescents in this study. Those who lived in stable environments seemed to be less stressed. Those who had to try to provide most of the stability themselves, by assuming increased responsibility for themselves and their families, experienced greater problems. This group seemed to fit into two of the patterns of identity formation described by Marcia (1980). Those with very close family ties seemed to have Identity Foreclosure, or early commitment to family values without differentiation of self. Those who were withdrawn from their families seemed to be in Identity Moratorium, or actively struggling with an identity crisis. Both of these patterns indicate some difficulty in establishment of a unique, separate identity, which is the developmental task of adolescents (Erikson, 1968).

For an adolescent, with rapid physical changes or changes in cognitive abilities or with frequent concerns over changing friendship patterns, there is little personal stability in daily life. The family of an adolescent needs to provide protection, nurturance, and

guidance for the adolescent, remaining strong yet flexible to accommodate the rapid changes (Preto and Travis, 1985). The family of an adolescent, then, should provide some of the stability and predictability in their lives as a "backdrop" for establishing identity.

The adolescents in this study had experienced many losses associated with the divorce of their parents. They all had lost their original intact family unit. Some also had experienced the loss of a parent, security of place, financial stability, success in school, and a relative freedom from responsibility. Some lived with stepparents, which they experienced as a loss of predictability in that parenting role. The effects of these losses varied from individual to individual. For some there had been many losses, with more than one divorce, a death, multiple moves, or greatly increased responsibilities. For others, the losses had been limited. In general, the greater the losses, the greater the stress.

The more recent the parental separation, the greater the stress. This stress seemed to be related mostly to the unpredictability of daily life, with many changes and losses occuring immediately after separation. For those whose parents separated in recent months, there had been moves, changing living patterns, increased financial concerns, and marked feelings of responsibility for their parents. They seemed to feel that somehow they should be

able to make things better. For those whose parents had separated several years earlier, there was less apparent stress. Sometimes this seemed to be because the adolescent had assumed major responsibility for household and childcare responsibilities, creating some stability and predictability for themselves at home.

For some of the adolescents in this study, the role of the parent had remained unpredictable. Some of these parents related to their adolescent child as a confidant and/or peer. These adolescents had been told adult secrets and given adult responsibilities. Although these adolescents viewed these as indicators of their maturity, they nevertheless were burdened by these responsibilities. This finding was consistent with those of Wallerstein, who described similarly overburdened children (1985b).

Most of the adolescents interviewed thought that they were more mature than most of their peers as a result of their parents' divorce. Maturity was equated with increased freedom, with increased responsibility, and with a broader perspective on everyday life. The boys talked of freedom and more independence as signs of their maturity. A few boys talked of feeling increased responsibilities for their mothers, in a rather cavalier fashion rather than personal or pervasive responsibility like the girls assumed. Most of the girls who were the older sister in their family talked of increased

responsibility for household work and childcare as indicators of their maturity. Both boys and girls talked about a broader perspective that helped them know that most problems can be managed and confidence that they can handle a lot themselves. Certainly, this perspective is a mature, self-confident one.

There was marked sex stereotyping, then, in the kinds of responsibilities assumed by these adolescents. It may be that the families and the community rewarded these behaviors and attitudes with approval. It may be that both boys and girls wanted to do something to help increase the stability and predictability at home. The girls may have found obvious needs which they could fill, such as doing the laundry or cooking, and received approval for doing these things. The boys may have seen similar needs and either did not have the skills and did not acquire skills to meet these needs or were discouraged from assuming these responsibilities. They, then, stayed away from home more, especially when stressed.

Most of the adolescents thought there were positive experiences associated with the divorce of their parents. Many of these positive experiences were ones that increased the stability and predictability in their lives. These positive experiences included greated maturity, increased closeness to parent or family, and diminished conflict between parents. Being more mature enabled these

adolescents to depend on themselves more with less dependence on their parents. The increased closeness some had with their custodial parent or with their parent and siblings gave them greater security and predictability and an important role within their families. When there was less parental conflict, one threat to stability was diminished.

The two adolescents in joint custody felt that they had increased opportunities and experiences related to their parents' divorce and the custody arrangements. They were glad to have these opportunities to experience different living arrangements and to visit different relatives. Both also were glad in some ways that they changed houses each week, as it provided "a break" from each parent. Enjoyment of diverse opportunities and experiences seems typical of adolescents. Also, enjoyment of "a break" from parents seems appropriately a part of the individuation process of adolescence. Perhaps when there is stability and predictability, which was apparently provided by both parents of each of these adolescents in spite of the frequent physical housing changes, there can be more opportunity for typical adolescent development.

The coping strategies used by these adolescents helped them to increase the control in their own lives either by gaining more stability and predictability in

their families or by decreasing their involvement in the family by increasing involvement in activities outside the family. All of these adolescents tried to "make sense" of what had happened in their families. Not having an cognitive understanding that was acceptable to them was very stressful. They attempted to gain cognitive understanding by talking with their parents, their friends, their siblings, or counselors. They also spent much time thinking about these past events. All of these adolescents used some form of social withdrawal from the family, such as spending time alone in their room or going out with friends. For some, activities outside the home, such as sports, church or clubs, or increased focus on schoolwork, provided them with positive feedback from their families and increased involvement outside the family.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1974) concluded that adolescents who withdrew somewhat from close family involvement during the stress of divorce did better than those who remained involved in their family. For the adolescents in the present study, that was not entirely true. Those who seemed the least involved or who stayed home the least seemed more lonely and described more difficulties with friends. Those who were most involved with their family seemed to be very close, with little separation from their families as is usually seen at this

stage of adolescense. Those that appeared to be doing best, then, were those who maintained some family involvement but also developed relationships and activities outside the family.

There were three dimensions of contrast of interest based on the literature: age at the time of divorce, sex of the child, and availability of the parents to the child. The age and sex of the child created some slight differences in the experiences of these adolescents. The availability of the parents seemed of greater importance in their experiences.

Age at the time of divorce seemed to have few effects on the experiences of these adolescents, other than those whose parents had very recently separated. Since all of the adolescent informants were freshmen in high school and close to the same age, age at parental separation interacted with the time since divorce. Many of the informants did not distinguish between parental separation and the legal divorce. Each informant was allowed to date experiences from whichever event seemed prominent for that individual. For those adolescents whose parents had divorced more than 10 years ago, when they were less than six years old, there were few memories of their families before the divorce. Indeed, there were few memories of their family or of the separation/divorce for many of these adolescents before age 10. Living with stepparents

for many years prior to adolescence seemed to make it easier to accept the stepparent, perhaps since there was little memory of another mother or father. Wallerstein (1984) felt that having few memories of the intact family made it easier for adolescents to adjust to living in the divorced family. However, for each of the adolescents in this study who were younger at the time of divorce, there were a number of other losses, such as subsequent remarriages and divorces or multiple moves, that added to the changes in their families. It is impossible, then, to separate the effects of age from the effects of all these losses. There were no remembered experiences, either positive or negative, that seemed to relate predominantly to age at the time of divorce.

For these adolescents, the notable difference according to the sex of the child was in their responsibilities and related definitions of maturity and in their use of talk as a way of coping. These differences were stereotypical, with the girls assuming responsibilities for housework and childcare. The girls also talked more about their problems with parents, friends, and relatives than the boys did. The boys became more independent, with increased freedom. It is not clear whether these differences are from differential feedback from their families or the community or are from some inherent differences within the adolescents and their

families.

The major contrast evident throughout the experiences of these adolescents was in the availability of both the parents to their child. Availability indicates not only the physical assessibility of the parent but also the emotional commitment of the parent to the child's well-being. Adolescents who had more than a single parent available to them spoke of more positive experiences and appeared to be less burdened by the divorce. Some adolescents spoke of grandparents or other relatives who were available to them and seemed to provide some mediating effect when only one parent was available. Older siblings who were available seemed to provide similar mediation. Only one boy mentioned an adult friend who seemed to fill this same role briefly. The research literature on fathering suggests that one important role of fathers is as a contrast to mothers, providing the child with more diversity in interactions and an additional relationship with different interpersonal qualities (Lamb, 1975). Some research would suggest that children who regularly interact with both their fathers and mothers are more adaptable (Spelke, Zelazo, Kagan, & Kotelchuck, 1973). It may be that two parents, and to some extent two relatives, are important to adolescents for similar reasons. A relative, more than an adult friend, may provide abiding continuity that enhances the

predictability and stability of family life. These factors may be of importance to the single parent as well as the children.

The positive experience the adolescents in joint custody had with having "a break" from one parent to the other would seem to support the importance of the availability of two parents. Perhaps this is especially important for adolescents. During the process of establishing an individual identity, it may be easier to separate from two parents than from one. When frustrated with one parent, there is another relationship to lean towards. Also, considering the extreme closeness between several adolescents in this study and their custodial parent, it may be easier to think of leaving a parent when they will not be so alone after their adolescent is gone.

The individual philosophies that each adolescent brought to these experiences modified their response. Philosophies were evident in the way they viewed their experiences. Most of these adolescents viewed their family structure as somehow different or no longer "normal". Somehow, in a society with over one million children a year experiencing parental divorce, these adolescents perceived their divorced families as different from those of their peers. Since adolescents typically want to be like all their friends, this view was stressful for them. Yet, some adolescents saw such stresses as

challenges that they could overcome. Surviving these challenges made them stronger and surer of themselves in meeting future challenges. Other adolescents felt these challenges to be somewhat overwhelming and beyond their control. They continued to try to meet the challenges and gain some control, but seemed to view their world as a difficult place to be.

The 11 adolescent informants in this study experienced the separation and divorce of their parents as a loss of stability and predictability in their lives. For some, this loss was temporary. They had regained stability and were continuing with normal adolescent development. Others continued to live in unstable and unpredictable families. They tried to increase the stability and predictability in their own lives by using a variety of ways of coping. These adolescents seemed either to be delayed in their developmental tasks or very mature for their ages. The separation and divorce of parents, then, was experienced by these adolescents as neither all good nor all bad. Rather, it was a major disruption in their lives that had profound effects for each of them.

These findings are generally consistent with those of Wallerstein (1984, 1985a, 1985b) and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) in a longitudinal study of a clinical population in California. Wallerstein also found major disruption

following parental divorce that was temporary for some adolescents and persistent for others, that had both positive and negative effects, and that was mediated primarily by the availability of stable parenting. In contrast to Wallerstein's findings, however, the adolescent informants in the present study did not differ in their experiences according to the time of their parents' divorce and, thus, their memories of their intact family. Rather, these adolescents seemed to use selective memory or denial to forget early family experiences and associated losses. With the systematic analysis of the qualitative data from this non-clinical sample of adolescents with divorced parents living in the Southeast, these results generally represent support for the findings of Wallerstein.

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Appendix 1
Demographic Questionnaire

age------- grade------- male--- female---

Are your parents divorced? ----------

If your parents are <u>not</u> divorced, please complete section <u>A</u> of this questionnaire. If your parents <u>are</u> divorced, please complete section <u>B</u>.

<u>Section A</u>

Do you have close friends whose parents have divorced?
yes --- no ---

Do these friends talk with you about the divorce or their relationship with their parents?
yes --- no ---

Do you sometimes worry that your parents will divorce?
yes --- no ---

Thank you.

<u>Section B</u>

How old were you when your parents divorced?

With whom do you live?

Mother ---
Father ---
Mother & Step-father ---
Father & Step-mother ---
Other (What is the adult's relationship to you?)

How long have you lived with these adults?

2 years or less ----
More than 2 years ----

If you do not live with your mother, how often do you see her?

almost every day ---
a few times a week ---
a few times a month ---
once a month or so ---
occasionally during the year ---
never ---

If you do not live with your father, how often do you see him?

---almost every day
---a few times a week
---a few times a month
---once a month or so
---occasionally during the year
---never

If you would consider participating in a study of adolescents whose parents are divorced, please give me your name and phone number so that I might call and talk with you about the study. Thank you for your help.

Name ----------

Phone ----------

Appendix 2
Informed Consent and Permission Letter

Dear Parent and Student:

As a doctoral student in Marriage and Family Therapy at Virginia Tech, I am interested in adolescents and divorce. I am studying the experiences of adolescents whose parents have divorced. The study will include individual interviews with each student. The interviews will last about 1 to 2 hours. Because I am interested in the positive as well as the negative experiences, I am hoping to include students who are doing well following the separation or divorce of their parents.

The interviews all will be conducted privately and will be audiotaped. The tapes will be stored in a locked box, with access only by me. Tapes will be erased at the completion of the study. Transcripts of the tapes will be made but only pseudonyms will be used and any identifying information will be removed. All written reports of the study will use these pseudonyms. Strict confidentiality will be maintained. The risks of this study are minimal. Any participant may withdraw from this study at any time.

Your child has expressed an interest in participating in this study. In order for you child to participate, I need to have the written permission of the custodial, and preferably both, parents and written permission from the child. I would be glad to discuss any details of the study with you at any time and answer any questions. You may call me at 951-3722.

Sincerely,

Dianne Birch, R.N., M.S.

Parental Permission

---------- Student's name
I have read the informed consent letter for this study of adolescents and divorce. I give permission for my child to participate in this study.

---------- Parent

---------- Parent

Student's Permission

I have read the informed consent letter for this study of adolescents and divorce. I agree to participate in this study.

---------- Student

Appendix 3

Interview Schedule

1. What was life like in your family before your parents were divorced?
    a. Age at separation
    b. How did child learn of separation? Feelings?
    c. Age at divorce?
    d. Family memories before divorce, especially parenting quality.

2. What has life been like for you since the divorce?
    a. Problems
    b. Positive changes
    c. School work
    d. Social interaction, especially support systems
    e. Parenting--how are things different? same?
    f. Contact frequency and quality with non-custodial parent
    g. Remarriage, stepfamily relationships

3. How have you handled the changes that have occured since your parents have divorced?

4. What has been hardest to handle?

5. What has been easier than you expected?

6. What would you like most to change?

7. How do you think the divorce of your parents will affect your future?

Appendix 4

Case Studies

Beth

Beth's parents separated when she was in first grade. She described her family as "really nice" before her mother began to use drugs and "run around", which was when Beth was five years old. When her parents separated, "at first I didn't know what happened, you know, I guess I felt like most kids, I felt it was my fault or something, but now after it all happened, Dad explained to me what happened. At the beginning, I was feeling real unsure." Beth and her younger sister have lived with her dad since the separation.

Beth described her dad as "always responsible" and "made sure we were okay". "Just the three of us, we just moved into an apartment and we got along great." Her mother "signed us over", and "after I realized, you know, she didn't even put up a fight. . .it kind of hurt that she didn't even try to be with us." Beth says that she knew even at that young age that "my Dad would take better care of us. . .my Mom was almost never there. She only came in like at night when we were in bed and then gave us a kiss good night." Beth rarely sees her mother. She was ambivalent in talking about her. She denied being angry with her or missing her. "I figure she's got problems.

It's something she has to work out." Later, she said that "the hardest thing is knowing that I won't get to see my mother as much as other kids see theirs. And knowing that . . .I have to say, 'My mom's in jail.'"

Beth describes her relationship with her dad as "very close". "We talk to each other about what's going on, you know. If we have a problem at home, we talk it out to see what we can do about it or what's gonna happen." She believes that because of the divorce, she and her dad "can talk things out a lot better than if my mom and he had stayed together." Beth assumes a lot of responsibility around the house and for her younger sister. She says her dad did most of the work when she was younger. "Then, when I started growing up, I turned eight, I saw what needed to be done and I just took the responsibility." Her dad praised her responsibility and she felt proud of herself, Beth says. "I knew it had to be done and I just did it."

Beth thinks things went well until her dad remarried five years ago. She and her stepmother do not "get along". "She's jealous of me and my father. . . . cause she thinks I'm interfering with her and Dad." Her stepmother's five children from her previous two marriages are older and do not live with the family. Her father's remarriage "pulled us apart a little bit but not nothing major," according to Beth, and they are still very close.

Beth says of her stepmother "she thinks just cause I'll go out to the garage with my dad and then we'll stay all day and we will just talk or something, and she gets really jealous." Beth says she has tried to get along with her stepmother, but it has not worked. "Every attempt you try to get something to try to help the relationship out, it backfires. . .She hates to do anything like around the house, and I'll do it all without an argument and she still comes up with something to gripe about." She has talked with her dad about this "big issue". According to Beth, "in the near future, he will get a divorce. He doesn't get along with her either. And neither does my sister." This is a secret between Beth and her father. Her stepmother "doesn't know they are going to get a divorce yet or anything but she suspects it."

Beth believes that her parents' divorce has affected her "Not negatively. It would have to be positive. It's all turned out for the better." She thinks she is more responsible in many ways. When asked if she thought she had missed some of her childhood, she responded, "No, It was okay. I did everything most kids did. I just did them real quick." Beth says she "wouldn't go out and get maried real quick" since she knows she can take care of herself. She seems to feel the second marriage is important. "If I get married and then get divorced and then get married, I will have to make sure that the second

one is right."

Beth gets good grades in school. "I knew I was supposed to get good grades and so I just did it." Beth also participated in sports in middle school, which she says made her dad proud. She feels close to her grandmother, aunts, and uncles and is comfortable talking with them about her concerns. She also has a friend with whom she talks. Beth states that she does not feel she has had any problems related to her parents' divorce. "My dad always said if you try to do something and can't, don't worry about it. If you can take on the responsibility, just do the best you can. I handled it (the divorce) well, the next person may not."

Cathy

Cathy's parents had separated just two weeks prior to her interview. She said she had known her parents were going to get a divorce for years. They had separated for several months five years ago, but they then reconciled. Cathy said she cried at the time because "I knew it was gonna get worse and it did." Cathy's older brother left for college soon after the reconciliation.

About 1 month ago, her parents told her they were going to get a divorce. They planned to stay together until a legal separation agreement was completed. Cathy was angry that they would continue to live together. "And I got real mad cause I didn't like that. Cause that was the main reason, to get away from each other. That was what I wanted." Cathy ran away from home, staying overnight at a friend's house. The next day her mother came and got her, and together they left her father.

Cathy believes that "both my parents used me really bad" to keep their marriage together. She feels as though she was in the middle of her parents' marriage. "I mean I got my self out of that a couple of times but. . .what it wound down to was that when they stayed together I was in the middle. . .and I tried for so long and so hard to get out of the middle." Her mother discussed her thoughts about divorce and plans for the future with Cathy. "Mom

was telling me that she was gonna get a divorce and she was gonna separate years before Dad even realized that. And that was pretty rough." Both her father and her mother told her of their frustrations with the other. "He told me some more things . . . about my mother and . . .she was saying lots of really bad things about my father."

Since Cathy and her mother left, her father has refused to move from the house. They have been staying with various friends "And so I have been sleeping on sofa beds." They are waiting for the court hearing later this month. "We have been living, I guess, for that day." Cathy thinks her mother's primary concern now is money. She is not sure what they will do until then, as her mother is applying for full-time jobs since she works part-time now. "What is gonna happen is that they're gonna get separated and divorced. I know I'm gonna stay with my mom. I'm gonna live with my mom and she's gonna get a job somewhere."

Cathy has talked with her father by phone. He would like for her to visit him for the weekend. "I gotta make that choice, if I want to see him, but Mom told me I couldn't take any money from him anymore. . . .I always thought that when I got my allowance, I kind of earned it. . .but now I can't. . . he asked me last night if I needed anything. I said, 'No, I'm all right.' So, I did what she

wanted but. . .not really what I wanted." Cathy also said she was afraid that her father "was really gonna be mad at me for leaving." She was relieved to find that he was not mad. "When you try to straighten things out and then things just keep falling down on you, there is only so much I can handle. . . .him expecting me to handle his marriage is not normal. . . .If I could do it, I would but there's nothing I can do. . .I can't make them sleep in the same room. I can't make their conversations. I wasn't there when they got married and so I don't know why they got married."

Cathy appeared stressed during the interview, talking rapidly, wringing her hands, looking very sad at times. She has talked about her concerns with her parents, school counselors, her friends, the school principal, adult friends, and the therapist she has seen for the past year. "I would be even more upset if I didn't talk about it." She readily asks for help when she feels she needs it. Her friends and activities at church have been a source of pleasure and comfort for her.

Sometimes divorce is for the best, Cathy thinks. "I'm gonna be all right. I know that. I always felt like I'd learn from it and never regret it. You know, there's always the happy home, the American home, but if you really think about it realistically now, there's no way we could have the all-American happy home because of, you

know, all the water under the bridge. You know, it's just, it's impossible."

Craig

Craig learned that his parents were going to separate five months before he was interviewed. "Mom come out and asked me how I would feel if she were to leave. . .Dad, and I told her that if she wasn't happy that I could understand that and that I would go with her." His mother had been waiting a year to get into the subsidized apartment. When she told Craig of her plans, he asked her to "spend one more family Christmas together and then we'd leave". Craig's dad was not told of these plans, but he found out as Craig's mother was leaving. With many threats to her, his mother decided that Craig should stay with his dad for a while before moving with her. During this brief period, Craig's father frequently was drunk and "I would be left at home alone. . .and things would worry me and I thought I was going to have an emotional breakdown". "I hid all their guns. . . cause I was afraid they might get into a big fight or something and I hid all the steak knives." Craig wrote his mother a note, knowing she was living nearby, and asked her to pick him up after school at his girlfriend's house. Craig then went to live with his mother. Craig was taking exams at school during this time.

Craig describes his relationship with his dad before the separation as distant. "We never got along cause he

never spent any time with me and so my Mom raised me practically by herself." Craig thinks his dad has changed a lot since the separation. "He's really spending some time with me now." Craig sometimes spends the weekend with his dad. He thinks his dad has changed in his behavior towards his wife. "Now my Dad is redoing the house and carpeting the rooms and things. . . .now and then. . .we all go fishing like down at the river on the bank. . . .he sends her flowers and things. He goes out there and cries sometimes and, I don't know, we might go back. I'm sort of hoping that we will, but I'm afraid if we do go back, he will change back to the way he was before. And it's so scarey cause Mom would give up the apartment and she will have nowhere to go." Being with his dad has helped his dad a lot, Craig says, but "it's done both harm and good cause I remind him so much of Mom."

Craig sees himself as being very much like his mother. "Me and my mom, we are the closest of any persons in the world and, if I have a problem, I don't talk to my best friend, I will talk to my mom cause, you know, she understands some things." Craig is proud of the changes he sees in his mother since her decision to separate. She now works fulltime. She plans to take some classes at a local community college. "Cause now she knows what she wants out of life . . .whereas she was all the time

sitting around in her nightgown cooking and cleaning while he was at work and. . . .she has always wanted to get her a job." He described how his mother "has found out the way" to her own mother's house and has gone to visit her several times. Previously, she had not seen her mother in three years because Craig's dad had refused to drive her there for a visit.

"Me and her like really grew close together cause she was always the one who, me and her, that held the family together." Craig is very ambivalent about the separation. He has had more time with his dad recently and enjoys living out in the country in the family house more than in his mother's apartment. Yet, he wants very much to protect his mother and help her. "I'm really trying to get Mom and Dad back together. . , but we are still afraid that he is gonna change."

After asking Craig several times about his own feelings, he finally declared that it was hard for him to think about himself when he was so worried about his parents. "Now I'm getting my own life back, but, you know, I still have to glance over my shoulder and make sure that they're staying right in line." Craig's grades in school have dropped markedly. He recently broke up with his girlfriend. "Since I have had to hold everybody together, I've, you know, work in school has gotten really low, and I used to be so careful of the way I would dress

and the way I looked and now I don't even care." Craig denied any thoughts of suicide.

Craig described himself as trying to cope by focusing on the most important people. "So, I've had to let go of my brother and my grandparents. I just visit them, but I'm trying to hold me and my father and mother together." Craig thinks he has become more mature because of the stress. Craig did talk enthusiastically of a part-time job he hopes to have this summer. He has great plans for the money he will earn. He wants a sports car for himself and "I think I'll buy my mom a mansion. And, my dad a mansion. Or just buy 'em one great big one, if they get back together." Craig also tries to reduce his stress by taking "all kinds of vitamins and I dance every evening when I get home."

Regressing to an earlier, simpler time in his life is another way Craig has tried to cope. "This past weekend I made myself go back. I went to my grandmother's and she has a big attic full of my old toys and things, and I went over there and played with 'em and things for a while. To sort of, you know, make myself see what all that I've been missing while trying to worry about them. And I noticed one big thing at the time, that some of the parts of the collections of the toys that I have had, some of 'em had been missing from when they had been fighting, and you know, I hadn't been worried about the toys, just about,

worried about Mom and Dad."

Jane

Jane is not sure how old she was when her parents divorced, she thinks about six years old. She remembers nothing connected to the divorce, she says, and has only a few disconnected memories of family life prior to the separation. Her mother also told her that her dad stopped giving his children any attention after the birth of her youngest sister. Jane remembers "my mom having some male friends and I remember my dad not playing with me." Her mother has told her that she "had been glad when they decided to get a divorce" because her mother's male friends would play with her.

Jane and her two sisters rarely saw their father after the divorce. Last year her mother "had gotten worried about what would happen to us if she died or something" and decided that the girls needed to make contact with their father. When they visited their father with their mother, "he seemed kind of indifferent about it all. . . he didn't really seem to care about. . .what we were doing, our problems or anything. . . .but since I have been away from him so long, it didn't really bother me."

About a year after the divorce, her mother remarried. Jane did not like her stepfather, even though he legally adopted her and her sisters. "He mentally abused us . .

.and he physically abused my sister." When Jane's mother "noticed this happening, she decided that they should be separated." After six years of marriage, "she told us she was going to ask him about getting a divorce before she told him and she was surprised that we were happy about it because we didn't want to show her how much we disliked him, because we didn't want to make her unhappy about it."

Jane seems to be somewhat ambivalent about the divorce, which occured about two years ago. "It was really sad for me because of the fact that I, of course, met his parents and his family, and his family was really nice people and I like his family a lot. So, I miss those grandparents. . . .I'm thinking about maybe seeing them but we are afraid like if we go to see them, we may have to see him. . . ." Jane talked with fondness and longing for the many members of her stepfather's extended family.

After the second divorce, Jane's mother moved to be near her parents and to return to school "because she want to get a career so we don't have to worry about not having enough money or income." Both Jane's father and her stepfather were in the military, so she has moved many times. She thinks the frequent moves are both good and bad.

The more difficult experiences after the divorces for Jane have been the lack of money and the lack of time with her mother since she has returned to school. Jane wishes

for more money for clothes or to go out with her friends. "Sometimes I can't go when they ask, but you know I try and think of things we can do that don't cost a lot."

Jane recognizes that her mother needs to spend time studying and is glad her grandmother is nearby to help, if needed. "We're left alone a little bit more. . .and sometimes I have to be on my own with some things but I have done that for a long time." Jane tries to accept that these long hours are necessary and looks forward to her mother's graduation this summer. "It's not like her life is just for us, she has to do things for herself, too."

The most difficult problems of all since the divorce, according to Jane, is helping her mother decide where she wants to work and live after she finishes school, "because you know we're involved in that and she talks to us about it." Jane recognizes that "the ultimate choice is hers" about what kind of job she takes, with what kind of hours, and whether they will move again. Jane says this is difficult for her, "just trying to learn how to accept the decision if it wasn't the one I wanted."

Jane worries about something happening to her mother. She is not sure if she wants to know what is in her mother's will, who will be the guardians for Jane and her sisters. Jane mentioned this concern several times during the interview. She says she knows her mother probably

will not get in a drunk driving accident, since she does not drink and is a safe driver. She also does not think her mother will kill herself. "So there's not that such chance that she is going to be killed either because I don't think there are many people to even dislike her."

Talking with her mother is Jane's major way of handling stress. She also talks with her friends. Their family has had family counseling and her mother and youngest sister still see a counselor occassionally. Jane feels that talking has gotten her through her stresses.

Jane feels that one of the good experiences related to the divorces is her relationship with her mother. "I guess I have a closer relationship to my mom than a lot of people my age. . . .I think I just got closer to her because I was older and sometimes she talked to me about problems. . .a lot of moms would not do that, they want to protect their children and my mom is not really like that. She wants us to know that life isn't as easy as people think it is and we should be prepared for it."

Jane also thinks she is mature and responsible. She attributes these qualities to being "in a situation most children aren't." She had to adjust to the divorce, then the remarriage, and then the abuse. "Once my mom found out about his abuse, she wanted me usually to stay with them (her sisters) when she wasn't around . . .to try to

keep anything from really happening, if I could. . . . I have always watched my little sisters. You know, my mom did not really leave me alone with them until I was about 10. But, I have kept an eye on them in the parks, while playing and things like that. So I always felt like I needed to watch them in case my mother was not around."

"Sometimes I feel like I grew up too fast, but that doesn't usually bother me." Jane thinks, though, that there are some advantages to being more mature--doing well in school, getting along better with adults, and not worrying about typical teenage concerns such as boys, popularity, or competition. Also, Jane thinks that worrying less enables her to help her friends with their problems. Jane says that she still has fun and acts "weird sometimes, and I still watch cartoons sometimes. . . .I think everybody sometimes needs to act a little childish."

John

John is 17 years old and in the 9th grade. John's parents separated when he was 11 years old. For some time prior to the legal separation, John's father was away a lot. "He'd come home every once in a while." Thus, John says, he "was prepared for" the news of divorce, yet "I didn't want 'em to split up." John has lived with his mother since the separation and divorce and has not seen his father for years. His older sister is married and lives in another town.

John worries that the divorce was his fault. "He waited until my sister above me got out of high school and then he left. So, I feel like I'm mostly to blame but everybody tells me I'm not but I still feel like I am." Throughout the interview, he expressed his concern that it was his fault because "I was a real pain when I was young." John began to smoke marijuana when he was 8 years old and soon began to use cocaine. "I used to be heavy into drugs and when Dad started staying away, I used coke and it messed up my nose. . .I got drunk a lot of times and I shot up a lot of times." John also dealt drugs in order to support his own drug use and to earn money. During this period, he was retained two years in school. After four or five years of drug use, John says he quit using them and "I don't mess with drugs no more." He used

drugs "as an excuse to get out." Drugs kept him from having to think or to deal with his problems. He credits his girlfriend of the past two years with keeping him off drugs. John also attempted suicide with a drug overdose "about two or three years ago." He denies any desire to commit suicide now, "life's too short".

"Sometimes I get in a depressed mood, usually when I'm home a lot." When he feels bad about things now, he goes to sleep. John spends most of his free time with his girlfriend or working. Sometimes he talks with her about his problems but does not feel she really wants to listen. Occasionally, he talks with her parents. "I've tried to talk to people but they seem like, you know, 'What are you doing spilling your guts out to me?'" He says he cannot talk to his mom and "She won't talk to me." Yet, he feels she needs someone to talk with, mostly about her concerns about him. John writes poetry and seems very pleased with what he writes. Also, he plays basketball at home and "I take a lot of my frustration out on it." John is not close to his sister or other relatives.

There have been some positive experiences related to his parents' divorce, according to John. "I learned a lot about life real quick." This mostly came, he believes, because there was little money. "If I wanted some (money), I worked." John also thinks there are not as many restrictions on him as there would have been if his

parents had stayed together. He thinks this is good. In contradiction, John says the hardest thing for him about his parents' divorce is "Me being on my own. I make my own money". He is not completely on his own, though, "because I don't have hardly any bills to pay." At home with his mother, John says "Me and Mom get in arguments". Recently, "I think we've straightened up a bit more normal. . .We've started getting closer."

John frequently commented on his wish to understand the reasons for his parents' divorce. "I don't know what caused it. I would like to find out." He described himself as feeling like "I got a burden on my back" with the divorce and no contact with his father. He seemed ambivalent about his concerns, though, also saying "I don't have that much on my mind and I don't care about much". "As soon as I move out this summer, I won't be thinking about it no more."

Rob

Rob lives in joint custody with each of his parents. His parents divorced four years ago. Rob and his brother, who is a year younger, spend a week with each parent. Both parents live in the same town.

Rob says "I thought everything was fine" in his family before the separation, but he does remember "right before they got divorced, they were arguing a lot". Both parents told the boys of their plans to separate. He describes his feelings at the time of the divorce as being like "somebody had taken something precious to you away."

The weekly physical move from his mother's apartment to his father's farm is "a total hassel" for Rob. This year they changed the "switch" day from Sunday to Friday and changed from two to one-week stays, which has made things easier. Rob, however, likes the contrast in activities and lifestyle at each parent's place. "I get to see both parents. I have cable at my Mom's but I have animals at my Dad's. I live in town with my Mom and I live in the country with my Dad. I have work to do at Dad's and I have nothing to do at my Mom's except watch T.V. It's just a nice change every week." Rob also thinks that joint custody gives him more freedom with both parents. "You're gonna be going to the other place in a

week. . . and that makes you feel like you can argue with it if you really wanted to. . . On Thursday night, if your mom's starting getting on you, you can just tell her off." He cautions that there are limits that both parents enforce. In general, though, "I think it's made home more relaxed."

Rob describes the most difficult experiences from the divorce as his parents' arguing, often over expenses for their children. He says he often feels like he is in the middle of the arguments, defending one parent to the other. "You're kind of the other person, defending yourself, and it's not good." "just knowing that they can't deal together and they won't deal with each other", he tries not to ask for things that require both of them to agree. "One of the worst things was the separation agreement. . ." Asked how he handled that, he said "I just had to stay out of that one. They did it with the lawyers."

Rob thinks that his dad is very critical of his mother, and his mother will not discuss with her sons anything connected to the divorce. He tries to ignore his father's comments about his mother. He sometimes feels "like I have to take care of my Mom. . . You feel just like you have to train her." Also, he has tried to discuss his dad's recent marriage and resulting problems with him.

Money was a problem in Rob's family before the divorce. It continues to be a problem. Rob believes that the lack of money would not be such a big problem if his parents did not need to support two residences. He wishes they were still together "only because of money." "I wish they could have gotten along but if they were gonna fight like this, the only reason I would want them together is so that they would be able to put their money together."

Rob's father remarried last year. He only knew his stepmother briefly before the marriage and voiced no objections when his father asked his opinion of the impending marriage. Rob felt, though, "this isn't quite right cause you've got this stranger living with you and you didn't know her at all. . ." The marriage only lasted a few months.

Rob said he is worried about the future. "I am afraid of what would happen if one of 'em did move." He thinks he probably will have to pay for most of his college education.

Rob describes himself as a very good student. During the time of the divorce, his grades improved and he made straight "A's". He thinks education is very important to both of his parents and "I feel that's my job instead of being home." Rob has friends and participates in sports activities after school. Doing things for himself and being more independent after the divorce has made Rob

"more mature than some of the kids", he thinks. He thinks this increased independence has been good for him, but he worries that "it's made my brother lazy. . .he's doing poorly in school and he doesn't do a lot of things for anybody else."

Sandra

Sandra's parents separated when she was nine years old and the divorce became final a year later. Sandra says that her parents "split because Dad had him somebody else. That had been going on since like before I was born." When her parents separated, they both wanted the three children and decided to give the children the choice. Sandra's older brother chose to live with his father. Sandra and her older sister chose to live with their mother. Both parents were willing to accept the children's decision. "Daddy understands when me and (sister) went with my mom, that, you know, it wasn't cause we didn't love him or anything but just because that's who we wanted to live with."

"At first things were hard," Sandra says about the separation. Then, "things started straightening out and, you know, me and (sister) were happy pretty much all the time after mom and dad separated." Sandra continues to see her father periodically. He lives in a nearby county. "I could see him anytime I want but I just don't go see him that much cause. . .I'm a teenager, I got things I want to do and he's got a life of his own." She visits him most often on holidays at her paternal grandparents' house. "I think if I saw him more often. . .we wouldn't get along as well as we do. . .because Dad's a lot more

stricter than my mom is." She does miss being "Daddy's little girl", though. She thinks her dad considers her "Mom's girl now."

Sandra does not get along well with her mom. "Me and Mom fight a lot but that's just because she's got her opinion of things and I've got mine, and I want to do things that she don't want to let me do." Sandra says her sister used to fight with her mom the same way. Her sister is married and no longer lives at home. "I've been in all kinds of trouble. I mean, I don't think it's cause my mom and dad got divorced. I mean, it's just me." Her mom thinks she's a "bad kid", according to Sandra. She and her mom fight a great deal over rules and Sandra's activities. "A lot of people think I'm pretty mature for my age and mom still doesn't want to leave me alone by myself. . .cause she doesn't want to alone by herself. And, she doesn't want to go places and do things by herself. So, she always wants me to go with her. . . But, I mean, I can't be with her all of the time and I guess part of it's cause I'm the baby, too." Most of her mother's problem, Sandra thinks is that "she feels sorry for herself. . . .she's had a hard life. . .but I can't feel sorry for her and be depressed all the time and it at home and talk to her while she's back in her room crying. . . .I'm 14 years old and I'm trying to grow up for myself." Although Sandra denies that she misses her dad,

she thinks the hardest things to handle are "Dad not being around and Mom being so insecure."

Sandra has "been to all kinds of counselors. I've been to psychiatrists, preachers, all kinds of stuff since Mom and Dad separated cause, supposedly, I'm a problem child." Often Sandra talks with her sister and sometimes her brother about her concerns about her mother. "A lot of time Mom upsets me really bad and. . . .I'm really, really hurt and, sometimes I get to where I'll just cry and cry and cry. . . ." Sandra has many older friends, some of whom she talks with. Of her other friends, she says, "One minute they could be your best friend and confidant, and the next minute, they'll stab you in the back...I know that and I accept that. . . .I just don't talk to them that much."

Sandra thinks the divorce has allowed her more freedom, since "Mom is not as strict as Dad." She thinks the divorce was good for both of her parents. "I think the whole entire family was better off when Mom and Dad got divorced."

For her future, Sandra says she does not want to get married and "I just don't want kids." "It's not because I'm afraid of divorce or anything, but it's just. . .that I'd rather have somebody who. . .cares about me and I care about them, and have it stay that way, and have me still be able to be my own person without getting married. . .

.I don't want to be deeply in love with this guy, and get married, and then, after we've been married six months, a year or two years, you know, and my feelings change and then have to make a decision whether I want to be my own person and divorce him. . . .I'm not the kind of person to hurt somebody like that. . ."

Steve

Steve's parents divorced when he was three years old. He and his younger sister lived with their father for a year after the separation, but custody was awarded to his mother by the court. Although his father lives in the Midwest, he maintains regular contact through phone calls and extended visits during holidays and the summer. Next fall Steve and his sister will go to live with their father for the school year. Both his mother and his father have remarried. His mother remarried about 10 years ago, and his father remarried a couple of years ago. His mother and stepfather have a seven-year old daughter of their own.

The interview with Steve occurred just after he had received his report card, and he was very worried about the response he would get from his mother and stepfather. Steve expressed a great deal of hostility toward them. "There's a lot of conflict between the way my mother thinks and the way I think." He feels his mother and stepfather do not listen to him and set many unfair rules. He has difficulty talking with them about any of his concerns, he says, including girls, school, and friends. Steve described his family life with just his mother as "a lot better than when my stepdad came. I guess that's because I wasn't in school yet. I didn't have any

responsibilities or anything."

Steve wants very much to live with his father and stepmother, whom he likes very much. "What I want is in reach but I never can have it, and that's living (with my dad)." He describes himself as feeling "trapped". From his perspective, there is no hope that his dad will regain custody. He did not seem to be clear whether or not his dad had sought to gain custody legally. Steve says his parents "don't get along very well but they have never actually got into a fight because they are never with each other long enough."

The divorce might have been good, Steve thinks, "if I could live with my dad all the time. But it wouldn't be too good about them fighting all the time. But if they, if they had never broken up, I would be a lot better." Knowing what it is like to live with each of his parents makes him more frustrated. "I know the good and the bad. But if I was brought up with the bad, I would think, I would think there was no other way. If I was brought up with the good, which I wish I was, but if, of course, I hadn't been brought up with the bad also, then I wouldn't realize how good the good was."

Steve has many friends, participates in a number of activities, and does fairly well academically. He talks about his problems with his dad by phone and during visits and with his friends. Also, he keeps a diary. He has run

away from home but returned before he was missed. He looks forward to living with his dad and stepmother next year but regrets that it is "just for the school year, not really live."

With the understanding and encouragement Steve feels he receives from his dad and stepmother, he thinks he could do must better in school and would be much happier. His perception of the contrast between his parents pervaded the entire interview. His desire to be with his dad was equally as strong. "It feels like I lose him all the time. It feels like I can never really have him. It's just like a coming-and-going thing."

Susan

Susan's parents separated when she was in third grade, just before her ninth birthday. Both her parents told Susan and her younger brother and sister of their plans to separate. Although her father moved out of the house, he maintained contact with his children. Joint custody was established from the beginning. Both of Susan's parents continue to live in the same town. She and her siblings alternate weeks living with each parent in their houses. Susan's father remarried and has an adolescent step-daughter, close to Susan's age. Susan's mother remains single but currently is living with a man.

Susan claimed to have very little memory of her family before the separation. She remembered that "they used to fight but . . .I guess I was too young to really think about it." About a year after her parents separated (about the time of their legal divorce), Susan "started realizing everything. . .and then I started crying all of the time." She does not remember what she was crying about. She had not told anyone at school about her parents' separation or divorce, "it didn't really matter." Susan briefly saw a counselor during this time.

At first, Susan and her younger siblings split each week between each parent's house. "But, week to week used to be confusing cause it was like three days and four

days, four days with my Mom and three days with my Dad. So, it was like really confusing. I had to have a suitcase every week." Susan and her siblings now stay an entire week with each parent, switching on Sundays. This works better for Susan. "It's just like having two different places to go. But, when I'm not at my Dad's house, it's not my house. I don't think of it as my house." Wherever she is staying is home for that week. Susan is very glad that her parents are "friends" and talk together, making decisions without fighting.

Susan does well academically in school, participates in extra-curricular activities, relates well with peers, and did not appear stressed during the interview. Although she wishes her parents had not divorced ("I'd want my parents to get back together cause. . .I want 'em to be more normal and everything"), she has carefully thought through the reasons for the divorce. "My Mom and Dad are a lot different and so I don't even see how they got along before." She describes the hardest things related to the divorce as "Getting used to my stepmother" and adjusting to her mother's friend "because he's not my stepdad and he's not my dad. . .and it's like he's just another person there." Susan describes some positive attributes of her stepmother, but she feels she can't always say what she thinks to her "cause I don't know her well enough." Having a stepsister who always lives with

her father and stepmother also is difficult for Susan, although she describes their relationship as "like sisters". At the beginning of a week with her father, Susan feels as though she and her siblings are visitors intruding on "the little family", but that feeling changes quickly to one of everyone being in the family.

Susan believes that she gets to go more places and receives more presents because of the divorce--travel and presents with two families instead of one. She enjoys having more relatives, "they're like my real family and everything and they are really nice to me." One advantage of joint custody, according to Susan, is "I kind of get a break from each of 'em". Although Susan several times expressed a desire for a "normal" family ("the way 'the Beaver' is with both his parents and everything"), she described her situation in joint custody as "kind of like having a normal family but it's just a separated normal family."

Tom

Tom's parents divorced when he was two years old. He and his older brother lived with his mother and regularly saw his father on weekends and during the summer. Tom remembers good times with both his mother and his father. His father was "manic depressive" and episodically "he would start to do crazy things". Tom mostly remembers his time with his father as "being lots of fun. I always looked forward to it."

Tom's mother died from cancer when he was nine years old. He and his brother moved from a large Eastern city to the Midwest to live with a maternal aunt and uncle who had two young children of their own. Tom and his brother continued to visit their father during holidays and the summer. During one of these visits, they were told they soon would be able to live with their father, which pleased them. Their father died, however, very suddenly several months before the boys moved, when Tom was 11 years old. Tom and his brother continue to live with his aunt and uncle and were legally adopted about two years ago. Together they chose to be adopted and to keep their own surname. The family moved to the Southeast two years ago.

Soon after their mother's death, Tom and his brother began seeing a psychologist. For months after his

mother's death, he cried a lot, especially at night. Tom felt that seeing the psychologist helped him very much, in dealing with his mother's death, "getting along with our aunt and uncle", and dealing with his father's death. Tom also keeps a diary, something his father encouraged him to do seven or eight years ago. He continues to talk to friends and his family whenever he is stressed with problems.

The hardest things for Tom after the divorce of his parents were dealing with the deaths of each parent and the frequent moves (four schools and four houses in two states since living with his aunt and uncle). He also expressed fear of what would happen to him and his brother and cousins if "something happened to" his aunt and uncle. Another difficulty comes with the choices necessary for holidays. Both his paternal and his maternal grandparents want to see him and his brother. "There is. . .usually a conflict on the holidays and sometimes we're left to decide whether we want to spent it with this side of the family or that side of the family and that's always hard, just trying to choose."

Throughout the interview, Tom was cheerful and relaxed. He obviously had given a great deal of thought to the events of his life. He stated "I guess in ways it was hard at the time...but now I look back and. . .I think its made me a better person." He sees himself as "more

mature. . .and I always try to look for the bright side of things." The events of his life, he believes, have helped him "put things more in perspective, you know, it's not as bad as it seems and it could be a lot worse and I think it's helped in that way."

Tom describes himself as a good student with lots of friends. He participates in a number of extracurricular activities. He talked with excitement about his family's recent move to a new neighborhood and bigger house. He gets along well with his aunt and uncle and cousins and expressed concern about his cousins' feelings about having to adjust to suddenly having two brothers. Although he describes a very close relationship with his older brother ("we would only talk to each other") just after his mother's and his father's death, he now feels "we don't need each other as much anymore and hopefully he will be going off to college in two years".

Trish

When Trish was two years old, her father died in an automobile accident. Her mother remarried and divorced in the next few years. Her mother again married several years ago and recently divorced that husband. Trish is the middle child, with two older brothers and two younger sisters. Each of the children, other than Trish and one sister, has a different father. Trish and her siblings always have lived with their mother.

Trish expressed a great sense of loss for her father, crying softly throughout the interview. "It hurts me because I don't have my dad and somebody will say something and i will get reeally upset, because my friends, they will talk about their dads and I'll . . .get real upset." She says that several of her sibling's fathers come to visit their children often and some of them "act like we're (her sister and her) their kids. My mom, she's got a boyfriend and he treats us like we're his kids. He's really nice."

Trish's older brothers sometimes act like a father for her, she says. They try to help her learn sports, especially basketball. Both Trish and her brother play basketball for high school teams. Her brothers also talk with her about grades and doing well in school. "And they

are over-protective and stuff, you know, they say don't do this and don't get into trouble, or something like that. If you ask them for something. . .they will give it to you because they both work and they both can drive, and they will take me places I want to go."

More than anything else, Trish worries about her mom. "That's why sometimes like in school, my grades will go down because like if my mom goes somewhere and, like if I babysit or something, I think about it because, you know my sister is there and I have to watch out for my little sister and stuff, and it just scares me sometimes. . . .If she don't come back or something, I will be afraid like if she had a car accident or something. And I think it'd be hard because if she ever went into the hospital, I don't know what I'd do if, you know something happened to her." Although Trish's mother is healthy and has not had a car accident, Trish has carefully thought out what would happen to each member of her family in the event of her mother's death.

As the oldest daughter, Trish feel very responsible for her family. "I'm the oldest one and I help her (mother) a whole lot. And like if I don't do it, it makes me feel bad because if I clean house and I take care of my sister, and if she asks me to do something, then I will do it or sometimes if I forget to do it, then. . .it just makes me feel bad because I didn't do it." When everyone

is busy and her youngest sister has to go to the babysitter, Trish says, "I will just sit there and worry about her and I think she'll get hurt or something." Trish does not talk to her mother about her worries because she feels her mother has enough concerns already. "Me and my mom never fight, she just like yells at me maybe and I won't yell back at her cause I respect her a whole lot, you know, and I will sit there and won't talk, you know. And she will say, 'I'm sorry' and stuff. Sometimes, it's just hard for her."

Trish sometimes talks about her worries to a friend. Often she goes out for a walk and cries "because I don't want my mom to see." Trish also does not think she can talk with her maternal grandparents, who she see regularly, "cause they'll worry."

Trish says she has grown up faster because "I've had a lot more responsibility. . .It's hard but I done made it pretty good so far, though." Also, "I think it makes me work harder, you know, so I can get out and make it in the world." Trish thinks that there has been some good of all these experiences for her family. "Our family is close, real close and I don't know if my dad would be alive would we be as close."

For the future, Trish hopes to go to college and eventually own a clothing store. She hopes to earn a lot of money so she can send her mom money to "get what she

wants and stuff." Trish says, "I don't really want to get married, though, but I'm afraid that, if something happened, you know, I might get a divorce or something and then if we have a kid, it might be hard on the kid, cause of what they had to go through. . .I would like to be able to go everywhere and travel and you won't have to worry about family or something like that. Like I can come and see my mom when I want to."

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