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HOW GENDER AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SEPARATION FROM PARENTS  
INTERACT WITH DEPRESSION IN THE YOUNG ADULT  
EXPERIENCE OF PARENTAL SEPARATION  
AND DIVORCE

by

Mary Oppenhuizen

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
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and Counseling Psychology

Western Michigan University  
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December 1992

HOW GENDER AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SEPARATION FROM PARENTS  
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AND DIVORCE

Mary Oppenhuizen, Ed.D.

Western Michigan University, 1992

The impact of parental divorce on children under the age of 18 has been studied extensively (Hetherington, 1979, 1981; Kurdek & Siesky, 1980; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1974, 1976, 1980). There has been far less research addressing effects of parental divorce on young adults (Bianchi, Rosen, & Reilly, 1987; Cain, 1989; Cooney, Smyer, Hagestad, & Klock, 1986; Farber, Primavera, & Felner, 1983; Kaufmann, 1987/1988). This may be due to the "common" assumption that young adults are psychologically separated from their parents in such a way that they suffer minimally when encountering parental divorce.

In this study, young adults from two Midwestern universities were asked to complete a brief survey, a Multiscore Depression Inventory (Berndt, 1986), and a Psychological Separation Inventory (Hoffman, 1984).

One group of participants consisted of 40 young adults whose parents had separated and/or divorced in the past 3 years after having been married to each other for at least 15 years. The second group, the control, consisted of 40 young adults from intact families in which the parents had been married to each other for at

least 18 years. This group was a stratified random sample which achieved a similar size and gender balance with the first group.

Using the independent t test with two-tailed probability, young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were found to be significantly more depressed than young adults from intact families. Female young adults experiencing recent parental divorce were not found to be more depressed than their male counterparts. Using a Pearson product-moment correlation, the degree to which young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were psychologically separated from their parents was found not to correlate with the amount of depression experienced.

It was concluded that young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce experience loss. It is important that psychological separation from parents is understood in the context of connection. What a divorce means to a young adult will be a function of the way in which the individual experiences or interprets the meaning of the divorce and various things that are connected to the divorce.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the United States today, 40% of the children under the age of 18 will spend a portion of their childhood living with one parent because of divorce (Glick, 1988). Divorce rates in the United States increased dramatically from 1967 to a peak in 1981 (Hodges, 1991; National Center for Health Statistics, 1990). Census figures indicate for the period 1970 to 1980, divorce increased 67.9%. Figures indicate for 1980 to 1990 only a slight decline of -1.2% (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1991). Although marital separation and divorce occur frequently in this culture, for the children of the separating parents, there is no other experience like it. In some ways, the death of a loved one and the bereavement that follows is the most similar to the experience of parental divorce, for parental loss through death or divorce causes internal and external life changes. Each situation involves mourning and loss, and each brings lasting changes in intimate relationships and in the fabric of daily life (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

#### Statement of the Problem

The available literature addressing the effects of parental divorce on children indicates a variety of differences in children's responses to divorce dependent on the child's gender, age, and the



number of years since the divorce occurred (Fine, Moreland, & Schwebel, 1983; Garbardi & Rosen, 1991; Hetherington, 1979, 1981; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978, 1979, 1982; Kurdek & Berg, 1983; Kurdek & Siesky, 1980; Lopez, 1987; Rohrllich, Berg-Cross, & Berg-Cross, 1977; Sorosky, 1977; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1974, 1976, 1980; Zaslow, 1989).

Although there is considerable literature, research, and demographic statistical information relating to the effects and frequency of parental divorce for children under the age of 18, far less is known about the impact of parental divorce for young adults. Young adults were defined in this study as individuals at least 18 years of age and younger than 24 years of age. Young adulthood is the time when many individuals traditionally leave home to enter college or the workplace and to live independently from their parents. The paucity in the literature and research is surprising considering the significance of this period in shaping the individual's early adult roles, values, and functions. College students, who were the focus of this study, face significant developmental demands, such as: moving toward adequate psychological separation from their parents; forming intimate, nonfamilial relationships; adjusting to academic and social demands of college life; and making preliminary decisions regarding work, marriage, and family (López, 1987). Whatever adventure, excitement, and optimistic emancipation may be associated with the young adults going off to college, it is also a time of vulnerability and high susceptibility to depression. There is an experience of loss of familiar surroundings. In

addition, from a constructive-developmental viewpoint, there may be grief over the loss of balance, the loss of feeling at home in the world (Kegan, 1982).

Additional pressures relating to parental separation and/or divorce, such as the loss of the ability to return to the home and family the young adult left, may also have profound effects for these young adults. Following parental separation and/or divorce, the home the young adult left when he or she went off to college will never be the same again. The degree of security and the experience of the support system he or she may have had will be permanently altered; and in some cases, his or her financial security will also be threatened. For young adults entering the rigors and new adjustments of college life, it is important that parents "remain-in-place" (Kegan, 1982, p. 129) so that young adults in transition can draw on the security available in the past and the present in order to progress developmentally into the future. For young adults experiencing parental separation and/or divorce, this critical stabilizing feature of family security and support changes, leaving young adults vulnerable to depression.

One explanation for the scarcity of research addressing the young adult experience of parental divorce appears to rest on the assumption that the effects of divorce are negligible when parents wait to part until their children have reached an age of 18. It is assumed young adults are essentially independent beings and are, therefore, likely to be relatively untouched by what is occurring in the lives of their parents. However, chronology and psychology are

not necessarily related. Although children are legally independent at the age of 18, they are not necessarily psychologically independent or autonomous (Kaufmann, 1987/1988).

On the other hand, many life-span theories of development (whether psychodynamic, psychosocial, or cognitive-developmental) do portray the relationship between parents and their children as one of increasing emotional distance over the years, suggesting that the impact of divorce will be substantially reduced when the two generations live, psychologically, in two different worlds (Kaufmann, 1987/1988). A number of researchers have concluded that the effects of parental divorce diminishes as age increases (Kurdek, 1981; Longfellow, 1979); and some agree with Esman (1982), who stated very definitely that "the healthy older adolescent is not likely to be seriously affected by changes in a family from which he is already well along the road to emancipation" (p. 272). It is not clear what Esman meant by "healthy older adolescent."

This research builds on the work of Kaufmann (1987/1988) and questions Esman (1982) and others who assert that parental separation and divorce only minimally affect young adults. This question rests on the work of three bodies of writing and research. First, it is based on the work of a number of theorists and researchers who have begun to critique the dominance of the separation-individuation theme in adolescent development literature (Adelson & Doehrman, 1980; Kegan, 1982; Offer & Offer, 1975). Second, it is founded on models of college student development specifically, which tend to stress the growth of both psychological autonomy and interconnection

during the college years (Chickering & Havighurst, 1981; Grayson, 1989; Katz, 1981). Third, it is based on the work of feminist scholars who have brought to light the male bias of much of the developmental literature with its pervasive bias on the themes of separation and differentiation to the exclusion of relational connectedness throughout the life cycle (Gilligan, 1982; Kaufmann, 1987/1988; Miller, 1986). These works form the theoretical basis for understanding the young adult's experience of parental divorce in light of his or her continuing relational connectedness to parents as well as separateness from parents.

#### Research Questions

Several studies (Bianchi, Rosen, & Reilly, 1987; Bonkowski, 1989; Cain, 1989; Cooney, Smyer, Hagestad, & Klock, 1986; Farber, Primavera, & Felner, 1983; Hepworth, Ryder, & Dreyer, 1984; Kaufmann, 1987/1988; Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1988; Morris, 1989) indicate parental separation and/or divorce does create difficulties for young adults. Many studies, however, have made little attempt to deal with the temporal confounds, that is, controlling for time that has lapsed since the divorce (Farber et al., 1983; Lopez et al., 1988) and/or they fail to focus on one, specific age group (Bonkowski, 1989; Cain, 1989; Hepworth et al., 1984; Packard-Garmirian, 1984/1985). Some studies (Cooney et al., 1986; Elliot, 1990; Kaufmann, 1987/1988) have a limited number of participants and no control group.

Many of the studies noted above fail to include the time following the initial parental separation in the study. Since the completion of the divorce can take years in some cases, this researcher agrees with Kaufmann (1987/1988) and Cain (1989) in recognizing the time period following the parental separation as an important variable to include in a study of the effects of parental divorce.

In research conducted by Farber et al. (1983), college counseling center directors were surveyed regarding their experience with college students, ages 18 through 23, who had experienced recent parental separation or divorce. It was noted that, overall, approximately 12% of all students attending the targeted colleges and universities were reported to receive mental health counseling services in the 1978-79 academic year. It was estimated by counseling center directors that the incidence of parental separation and divorce within this group of counselees was 13%. It was reported that young adults encountering parental divorce displayed greater behavioral and affective difficulties than their counterparts from intact families. Respondents indicated parental divorce created a highly stressful life transition for students, possibly contributing to adjustment problems, including sexual identity, interpersonal relationships, and academic performance. Females indicated more difficulty adapting to this family disruption than males. The following were all reported as to have potentially important impact on the students' efforts to adapt to this transition: the degree of family conflict experienced both prior to and following the separation, the year in college, the place in the sibling constellation, and the

amount of time the students had been out of the house. A paucity of services targeted for the young adult of parental divorce was noted.

Difficulties for young adults resulting from parental separation and/or divorce which had been noted in the literature indicated the possibility that young adults may not be psychologically separated from their parents in such a way to warrant the assumption that parental separation and/or divorce generate only minimal effects. There was a need for further study addressing effects of parental separation and/or divorce on young adults, including a measure for psychological separation from parents.

The available research generated the following questions regarding the young adult's experience of recent parental separation and/or divorce: In what manner are young adults affected by the recent separation and/or divorce of their parents? Is this group of young adults more depressed than young adults with intact families where there has been no separation or divorce? Do female young adults encountering recent parental separation and/or divorce experience a greater loss than their male counterparts? Does the degree to which a young adult is psychologically separated from his or her parents correspond to the amount of loss he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce?

### Hypotheses

The research questions for this study were derived from theories which recognize the inclusive, dependent side of college students as well as the autonomous, independent side (Chickering &

Havighurst, 1981; Grayson, 1989; Katz, 1981; Kegan, 1982). These research questions prompted the formulation of the following hypotheses.

The first research question inquired the manner in which young adults are affected by recent parental separation and/or divorce. The second research question asked if this group of young adults are more depressed than young adults with intact families where there has been no separation or divorce. Addressing these questions, Hypothesis 1 was stated: Young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce will experience significantly higher levels of depression (measured by the total score of the Multiscore Depression Inventory) than young adults from intact families. It was proposed that loss manifested in depression is experienced by young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. If it could be shown that young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce experience significantly greater depression scores than young adults from intact families, then it could be assumed that a relationship exists between these variables.

In consideration of previous studies (Cooney et al., 1986; Farber et al., 1983; Kaufmann, 1987/1988), it was expected that females would experience greater loss manifested in depression (measured by the total score of the Multiscore Depression Inventory) following parental separation and/or divorce than their male counterparts.

Hypothesis 2 addressed the research question which asked if female young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or

divorce experience a greater amount of loss than their male counterparts. Hypothesis 2 was stated: Young adult females experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce will experience significantly higher levels of depression (measured by the total score of the Multiscore Depression Inventory) than young adult males experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. It was expected that female young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce would experience more loss; therefore, they would score significantly higher on the Multiscore Depression Inventory than their male counterparts.

The last research question asked if the degree to which a young adult is psychologically separated from his or her parents corresponds to the amount of loss he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce. Psychological separation was defined in this study as an individual's movement in the direction of autonomy and self-direction, a sense of responsibility for the self and disentanglement from parental control, developing in the context of connection, while maintaining and modifying relationships with parents. Hoffman (1992) stated that the Emotional Independence scale and the Conflictual Independence scale of the Psychological Separation Inventory (Hoffman, 1984) could be used to measure for the above stated definition of psychological separation. It was necessary to address Emotional Independence and Conflictual Independence separately, since the scales could not be added together because they are not positively correlated (Hoffman, 1984).



Addressing the research question which asked if the degree to which a young adult is psychologically separated from his or her parents corresponds to the amount of loss he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce, Hypothesis 3 was stated: The degree to which a young adult is emotionally psychologically separated from his or her parents (measured by the total score of the Emotional Independence scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory) will not significantly correlate with the amount of depression he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce (measured by the total score on the Multi-score Depression Inventory). It was expected there would not be a significant correlation between the amount of depression experienced by young adults encountering recent parental separation and/or divorce and the amount of emotional separation they have from their parents (measured by the combined emotional separation scores for mother and father on the Psychological Separation Inventory, [Hoffman, 1984]).

The research question which asked if the degree to which a young adult is psychologically separated from his or her parents corresponds to the amount of loss he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce was also addressed by Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 4 was stated: The degree to which a young adult is conflictually psychologically separated from his or her parents (measured by the total of the Conflictual Independence scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory) will not significantly correlate with the amount of depression he or she experiences

following recent parental separation and/or divorce (measured by the total score on the Multiscore Depression Inventory). It was expected that there would not be a significant correlation between the amount of depression experienced by young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce with the amount of conflictual separation they have from their parents (measured by the combined conflictual separation scores for mother and father on the Psychological Separation Inventory, Hoffman, 1984).

### Definitions

The following terms are used throughout the research:

Young adult: A young adult is defined in this study as an individual at least 18 years of age and younger than 24 years of age.

Intact family: An intact family is a family in which the mother and father of the child have been married at least 18 years and are currently married and living together.

Recently separated and/or divorced: Parents who are not currently living together and/or have been divorced within the last 3 years after having been married to each other for at least 15 years are referred to as recently separated and/or divorced.

Psychological separation from parents: Psychological separation from parents is defined in this study as an individual's movement in the direction of autonomy and self-direction, a sense of responsibility for the self, and disentanglement from parental control, developing within the context of connection, while maintaining and modifying relationships with parents.

Emotional independence from parents: Emotional independence from parents is defined as freedom from an excessive need for closeness, togetherness, approval, and emotional support in relation to the mother and the father (Hoffman, 1984).

Conflictual independence from parents: Conflictual independence from parents is defined as freedom from excessive guilt, mistrust, anxiety, anger, resentment, responsibility, and inhibition in relation to the mother and the father (Hoffman, 1984).

### Limitations

The present research addressed the association between parental separation and/or divorce and a young adult college student's subsequent adjustment. Interpretive difficulties in such research reflect the inability to control for all variables, such as: quality of the relationship with parents before, during, and after the separation and/or divorce; support from siblings or others; and stage of the young adult's psychological development at the time of the separation and/or divorce. These variables may confound the results. Special circumstances experienced by subjects during testing which are operative in most studies, including ill health, other relationship difficulties, and degrees of current stress, may influence the results as well.

Quantitative instruments were mailed to individuals who agreed to participate in the study. Limitations of using mailed quantitative instruments were: (a) lack of flexibility, (b) lack of nonverbal behavior, (c) no control over the environment, (d) no control

over question order, (e) minimal control over date of response, (f) inability to use complex questionnaire format, and (g) the possibility of a biased sample (Bailey, 1978).

The main purpose of the research was to explore the experience of young adults who encountered recent parental separation and/or divorce. The research focused particularly on how gender differences and psychological separation from parents interacted with depression in the young adult experience of parental separation and/or divorce.

The remainder of this dissertation is presented in four chapters. A review of selected literature is included in Chapter II. The topics of loss, gender, and psychological separation are presented. Relating the topics to the young adult experience of parental separation and/or divorce, theoretical concepts and a review of empirical studies for each topic are given. Chapter III includes information relating to the method, procedure, subjects, variables, and instrumentation used in the study. Research questions and hypotheses are also presented. The findings of the research are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V includes an interpretation of the analyses by hypothesis. A discussion section follows which includes limitations of the research and suggestions for further study. A summary of the study is given.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

This research addressed the young adult's experience of parental separation and divorce and how gender and psychological separation from parents interact with depression. The literature review is divided into three sections. The first section addresses the concept of loss and parental divorce, while gender and parental divorce are addressed in the second section. In the third section, psychological separation from parents and parental divorce is addressed. Each section includes theoretical concepts of each topic as well as a review of empirical studies relating the topic to the experience of parental separation and/or divorce for young adults.

#### Loss

In this section the theoretical concepts of loss and parental divorce are addressed. A review of related empirical studies is presented.

#### Theoretical Concepts

The experience of parental divorce creates many losses for the young adult. These losses include the death of the family as the young adult has known it, the loss and alteration of relationships with loved ones, the loss of concepts of what life was and what life

will be, the loss of one's self as one was in the former family unit, and the loss of friends, income, and old familiar patterns of daily living (Packard-Garmirian, 1984/1985).

Following is a brief summary of three major theories concerning loss as presented by Packard-Garmirian (1984/1985). Freud (1917), Bowlby (1960), and Kubler-Ross (1969) were chosen because of their contributions addressing the experience of loss. Each theorist described the important experiences of loss and the themes or stages these experiences define.

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud (1917) explained the common themes of loss for the individual. These included: continued thoughts of the lost object (or relationship), painful feelings of dejection, a cessation of interest in the world, the loss of the capacity to love, and a lowered self-regard.

Bowlby (1960) presented evidence that the process of mourning in adults is substantially similar to that of children. He conceptualized the process of grief in four stages: (1) numbing, (2) yearning and searching for the lost relationship, (3) a period of disorganized patterns of interaction, and (4) a period of reorganization.

Kubler-Ross (1969) developed her theory of loss around five stages of grief she found to be common in grief experiences. These stages were: denial, anger and guilt, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

The theories (Bowlby, 1960; Freud, 1917; Kubler-Ross, 1969), although different, appear to have many similarities. Loss, for the

above mentioned theorists, involves the painful and slow process of withdrawing energy and libido from the lost relationship and directing it into other significant directions. The common elements of loss appear to be denial, sadness, loss of interest in the outside world, searching or yearning (physically or cognitively) for the lost relationship, sobbing, reiteration of painful memories, and the beginnings of a redefinition of life without that relationship (Packard-Garmirian, 1984/1985).

#### Empirical Studies of Parental Divorce and Loss

Although a young adult experiencing parental separation and/or divorce may not experience a complete loss of one's relationship with one's mother or father, the relationship often changes significantly and the young adult may experience loss. There are many losses, including loss of one's traditional family, and sometimes loss of: the family home, emotional support, financial support, family traditions, and home life as one has known it to be.

Several studies have addressed loss as a component of the young adult experience of parental separation and/or divorce. The ages of the subjects in the following studies included the ages defined as young adult in this study (18 through 23); however, sometimes a broader definition for young adult was used. Therefore, the ages of the subjects in the following studies are noted.

Interviews of 48 subjects between the ages of 18 and 26 were conducted by Cain (1989). This study, which did not have a control group, investigated the impact of parental separation and divorce on

a nonclinical college student population whose parents had been married at least 19 years and had separated after the subject's departure from home for college. The students were interviewed within 3 years of the parental separation. The findings suggested the participants' experience of parental divorce was a wrenching; disruptive; and in many cases, a disillusioning experience, at least during the early phases of the adaptive phases. The collected data suggested that despite the subject's advanced stage of development, they experienced loss. Cain (1989) stated the subjects desperately needed to deny the painful realities of their parents' marital conflict and impending divorce. The students were more likely to blame a parent than blame themselves and were likely to use aggressive morality as a conduit for rage. Experiencing a series of role realignments after the divorce, the subjects also demonstrated altered attitudes toward romantic love and marriage. In striking role reversals, the subjects muted their own wishes for compassion and support and ministered to the needs of their parents instead, thus parenting their parents. They also attempted to substitute for their parents' missing partners by alternately assuming the role of proxy wife to fathers or proxy husband to mothers. Abandonment anxiety was exhibited in most of the students sampled, wherein they viewed relationships as not permanent and partners as inconsistent. Most believed they were doomed to repeat their parents' marital failure.

Packard-Garmirian (1984/1985) explored the experience of parental divorce, using subjects from 21 through 33 years old whose



parents had divorced within the preceding 8 years. Using no control group, 18 men and women were interviewed and both quantitative (Likert scales) and qualitative data (in-depth interview) were gathered. It was noted that the experience of parental divorce for the subjects was that of loss. Participants in the study indicated feelings of anger, sadness, depression, mourning, fears of abandonment, and a shaken sense of identity. Findings also indicated that the divorce influenced the participants' feelings of increased separation from family and parents.

The manner in which participants regarded intimacy and careers was also influenced according to the Packard-Garmirian (1984/1985) study. For some, plans to marry were either delayed or complicated. For many, it brought questions, concerns, and skepticism. For others, parental divorce reaffirmed their intimate commitment and strengthened their marriage. As to effect on careers, many used the experience to channel their time and energy into positive, productive activity, while others stressed that the divorce had taken away both concentration and energy from their studies or jobs.

Packard-Garmirian (1984/1985) arrived at three conclusions from the study. First, parental divorce for this age group was experienced as a serious and significant loss. Secondly, the participants appeared emotionally involved and affected by the divorce situation but not immobilized by it. Unlike young children, these individuals had larger more secure support systems on which to rely and gain support. The third conclusion was that divorce is a family issue. Participants related the tremendous loss of family that they felt.

The divorce did not involve only the participants of the study and their parents--it was an overwhelmingly complex situation which involved the entire family. Not only the changes generated by the divorce in the family, but also the long process of family redefinition were noted by the subjects. Family members were involved in dismantling, reorganizing, and rebuilding relationships. They also were involved in trying to make sense of the situation as a whole.

Using a semistructured interview and no control group, Elliot (1990) examined how parental divorce affected students, ages 18 to 28, who were enrolled in college or graduate school at the time of the divorce. Using a sample of 7 men and 7 women, three aspects of the divorce experience were addressed: emotional reaction, concerns and worries, and coping strategies. The results indicated that the college students experienced parental divorce in profound and varying ways. Anger was the most commonly expressed emotion for this sample. Many subjects also experienced relief, after an initial reaction of anger. Despite the fact that most of the participants understood the nature of their parents' relationship, many were shocked to learn of their parents' decision to divorce. A sense of loss was also reported with subjects, comparing the experience of parental divorce to the experience of a death. Concerns about family life and family matters predominated the participants' thoughts. Worries about parental well-being were the most frequently reported concerns, particularly worries about mothers. Students were also concerned about siblings in the home, divided loyalties, and the breakdown of family traditions. Six types of coping strategies were

observed: dissociating, acquiescing, vocalizing, secretizing (withholding family information from others), nurturing, and kinkeeping (putting themselves into the role of family negotiator for parents or other family members).

Not using a control group, Bonkowski (1989) explored the reaction of 42 participants whose parents divorced when the subjects were between the ages of 18 and 30. Questionnaire results indicated 40% of the subjects reported a deep and lingering sadness. These subjects continued to question why the divorce had occurred and mourned the loss of the family unit years after the divorce. Concern for their parents and difficulty in establishing a separate relationship with each parent were also noted. Relationships with fathers were found to be particularly at risk. Emotional distance from and anger toward one's father often caused guilt. Questions were triggered regarding marriage, commitment, and trust.

Hepworth et al. (1984) examined the experience of parental loss and the immediate effect on courtship behavior. The study compared 57 subjects who had experienced recent parental death, 61 who had experienced recent parental divorce, and a control group of 132 individuals not experiencing parental loss of any kind. Single college students with a mean age of 20 and married couples ages 17 to 28 were surveyed. Subjects who experienced loss from parental divorce generally had accelerated courtship patterns and greater interest in relationships.

Morris (1989) interviewed 12 subjects ages 18 to 30 who had experienced parental divorce. The research focused primarily on

Wallerstein's (1983) six psychological coping tasks; the third task was resolution of loss. All of the participants reported they felt loss in some form. This included loss of a concept of family, loss of an ideal image of marriage, loss of formerly available opportunities, and loss of familiar physical surroundings. Other deeply felt losses reported were losses of actual relationships with family members, losses of surrounding support systems, loss of self-confidence, and loss of the ability to trust others. Multiple losses were reported by most subjects. Some of the participants reported the loss they felt was a counterpart to experiencing some gains or relief from the parental divorce. Although surprised at the depth of emotion and significant pain experienced, most were able to gain something constructive for themselves through their painful experience.

Very different results were found in a study by Bhatt (1989/1990). This study examined the effects of recent parental divorce, parental death, parental conflict, and social support on the emotional and social adjustment of college students. Using a control group of students from intact families, this study examined students who had experienced parental loss via divorce or death in the preceding 3 years. Individual interviews were conducted with 143 students, ages 17 to 21. Bhatt proposed that parental divorce can be viewed as consisting of two components with potentially different implications for young adults. The first component was loss of one parent from the home, which would trigger a grief reaction. Parental conflict, the second component, might also result in sadness or

depressive symptoms, as well as a variety of other adjustment difficulties. Social support was viewed as a buffer or source of protection from potentially harmful effects of social and environmental stressors. Parental divorce was found to be unrelated to the subjects' emotional, behavioral, or social adjustment. Parental conflict was related to more negative relationships with parents, but not to other outcome measures. Social support was also found to be unrelated to outcome, although the overall high levels of adjustment did not provide the necessary conditions for testing the hypothesis that social support would affect individual reactions to divorce. It was concluded that late adolescents possess the cognitive abilities to perceive and respond to the parental relationship in a rational and mature manner and may be less vulnerable to developmental disruptions due to parental discord than previously assumed.

### Gender

In this section, the theoretical concepts of gender and parental divorce are presented. A review of related empirical studies is also included.

#### Theoretical Concepts

A number of feminist scholars (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1984, 1986; Surrey, 1991) described the female sense of self as developing within and through the context of relationships and contrast this relational orientation with the male identity. The male sense of self was portrayed as emerging through a process which

emphasizes psychological separation and differentiation from others. Douvan and Adelson (1966) identified this relational orientation specifically in adolescents. This was confirmed by other researchers, such as Ganong, Coleman, and Brown (cited in Kaufmann, 1987/1988) and Astin and Kent (cited in Kaufmann, 1987/1988), who discovered that female college students scored higher than males on items reflective of relatedness; and males tended to score higher than females on a measure of autonomy.

Kaufmann (1987/1988) suggested that the separation and divorce experience involves issues of interpersonal relatedness, for example: the nature of the couple's relationship that led to the separation, relationships with the two individual members of the couple when they are no longer married, the nature of the former couple's contact with each other following the divorce, and the effect on relationships with other family members if the former spouses find new partners. According to Kaufmann, with relational issues predominant in the process of separation and divorce, female and male young adults may experience the separation somewhat differently.

#### Empirical Studies of Parental Divorce and Gender

It was thought that since the experience of parental separation and divorce clearly involves interpersonal relatedness, male and female students would experience the situation somewhat differently. In this section, research studies focusing on gender issues of young adults who experience parental separation and/or divorce are presented. As noted for studies in the previous section, although the

studies overlap the age defined as young adult in this study, the ages of subjects in some studies varied. Therefore, the ages of participants for each study are specified.

Cooney et al. (1986), without using a control group, interviewed 18 male and 21 female college students ages 18 to 23, whose parents had divorced within the preceding 3 years. While the prevalence of emotional vulnerability and stress was high for both genders, women were more likely than men to report emotional problems at some point in the divorce process (62% versus 42%). It was found that the divorce had considerable impact in a number of areas: decline in emotional health, experience of anger, concern about conflicted loyalties, worry about parents, and many changes in parent-child relationships. Worries about one or both parents were reported by 77% of the sample. Over one-third of the males and females felt uneasy about the future of both parents.

Anger was a common experience in the Cooney et al. (1986) study, with 67% reporting at least initial anger at the news of the divorce. Feelings of anger were more frequently reported by females than males (76% versus 50%). Females were more likely than males to discriminate between their parents as targets of their anger; 43% of the females identified their fathers as the lone target for their anger, while only 14% cited their mothers as targets. In contrast, 11% of the males identified the mother and 11% the father as the lone target of anger. Twenty-eight percent of the males and 19% of the females reported rage toward both parents (Cooney et al., 1986).

Rather than limiting the focus of her study to the time period following parental divorce, Kaufmann (1987/1988) included the period following the initial parental separation in her study. She interviewed college students from the age of 18 to 23 whose parents had separated in the past 3 years, after the young adult had left for college. Using a sample of 30, with no control group, this study examined gender differences and concentrated on the following five areas: (1) parent-child relationships, (2) sibling relationships, (3) affective and behavioral responses, (4) interpersonal communication, and (5) meaning of the separation and divorce. Students were asked to complete a questionnaire as well as participate in a structured interview. Female students expressed greater concern and responsibility toward parents and siblings than did male students. They also reported more anger at their parents, more problems with concentration and academic performance, as well as greater anxiety and fear than males. Females communicated with more individuals about the family issues and shared more with same-sex peers than males. Although gender differences in the participants' responses were evidenced in many areas, the differences were not as widespread as anticipated.

Kaufmann's (1987/1988) study helps to clarify possible differences between male and female student's reactions to parental divorce. It is useful in that it examined a narrow age group (18-23), including only those students whose parents separated after the student left home for college. In addition, this study recognized the importance of the time following the initial parental



separation, as opposed to studies that look only at the time period beginning after the divorce has been granted.

Bianchi et al. (1987) examined the effects of parental divorce on college students using measures of depression, self-esteem, sexual behavior, attitudes about marriage, and general psychological functioning. This controlled study ( $N = 500$ ) compared students whose parents were divorced with students whose parents were married, and made specific comparisons across gender of the students and number of years since the parents' divorce. This study included subjects with both recently divorced parents as well as subjects with parents divorced for a long period of time. The results indicated that men with divorced parents experienced more depression than women with divorced parents. Women who had experienced parental divorce within the past year showed a greater degree of expressiveness than women who had experienced parental divorce more than one year previously. This was not true for men. The hypothesis that college students whose parents divorce would have more negative attitudes toward marriage was not supported. The hypothesis that college women whose parents divorce would exhibit more sexual acting out was also not supported.

As cited previously, Farber et al. (1983) surveyed college counseling center directors regarding problems associated with parental divorce for young adults 18 through 23 years of age. Analyses of the responses revealed that a highly stressful life transition for young adults is created by parental divorce. Counseling center directors reported that young adults encountering parental

divorce seen for counseling displayed greater behavioral and affective difficulties than their counterparts from intact families. Adjustment problems were noted in the areas of the young adult's sexual identity, interpersonal relationships, substance abuse, and academic performance. It was also indicated that females have more difficulty adapting to this family disruption than do males. In an attempt to adapt to the divorce, females in this study were also found to seek counseling more frequently than their male counterparts. A lack of services targeted for young adults of parental divorce at the surveyed institutions was noted.

### Psychological Separation

In this section, the theoretical concepts of psychological separation and parental divorce are addressed. A review of related empirical studies is also presented.

#### Theoretical Concepts

Psychological separation can be understood in the context of an interpersonal, parent-adolescent relational processes. Grotevant and Cooper (1985) suggested that the adolescent's adaptive functioning (for example, identity development and role-taking ability) is enhanced through parent-adolescent relationships that balance familial connectiveness with individuation. The fact that individuation and connectiveness are not in opposition was also noted by Josselson (1988). Josselson stated that individuation occurs in the context of relationships.

In the ethological model of attachment conceptualized by Bowlby (1969) and expanded by Ainsworth, Blehar, Walters, and Wally (1978), the attachment figure serves the adaptive function of providing a secure base, which allows and promotes exploration and mastery of the environment. Both parents provide a secure base from which the child or adolescent can make sorties out into the world and to which he or she can return, secure in the knowledge that he or she will be welcomed, nourished physically and emotionally, reassured if frightened, and comforted if distressed (Bowlby, 1988). As children and adolescents get older, they venture steadily further out from the base for increasing lengths of time. The more confident they are of their secure and responsive base, the more they take it for granted. However, if one or the other parent should become sick or die, the immense significance of the base to the emotional equilibrium of the child, adolescent, or young adult is immediately apparent (Bowlby, 1988).

Kenny (1987) viewed attachment as an enduring affective bond that can promote autonomous functioning and not a connection that is synonymous with dependency. Bowlby (1988) contended the traditional term "dependence," had a baleful influence. Dependence had always carried an adverse valuation with it and had tended to be viewed as a characteristic of the early years and which soon should be grown out of. As a result, often in clinical circles, whenever attachment behavior was shown during the later years, it was regarded as regrettable and was even called regressive. Bowlby (1988) believed this to be an "appalling misjudgment" (p. 12).

Kenny (1990) suggested that the conceptualization of the way in which young adults achieve individuation from their family during the college years needs to be reconsidered. The young adult's affective closeness to parents should not be perceived as synonymous with dependency or the antithesis of independence. Whereas it is generally assumed that attachments to parents diminish during the college years, the ethological view of the attachment figure as a secure base, in contrast, suggested that secure parental attachments are stable and promote competence and autonomy.

According to Kegan (1982), parents and home ideally provide a "holding environment" (p. 186) for young adults, providing a stable interpersonal context that acknowledges the nature of the past self, thereby helping to launch the evolving individual to the next and higher level of human development. As the young adult evolves, it is important that his or her environment "remain-in-place" (p. 129) in order for healthy integration to occur. Parents can help provide this function as they "remain-in-place" (p. 129) so their young adult children can draw on the security of the past and present in order to progress developmentally into the future. This includes being consistently available to young adults in order to support them in any way their needs may require. By staying in place, the parent represents the young adult's past or earlier development, making it available to the student's changed or altered sense of self.

The effects of separation and divorce on young adults can be adequately examined and understood only when the nature of the bond

between the parent and the young adult during this stage of development is fully appreciated (Kaufmann, 1987/1988).

#### Empirical Studies of Parental Divorce and Psychological Separation

Lopez et al. (1988) addressed the effect of parental separation and divorce on college students' psychological independence from parents in a study of college students. A control group of 255 college students whose parents were married was compared to a group of 112 college students whose parents were divorced. Approximately 70% of the subject sample were freshmen and sophomores. The mean age of the sample was 20 years. There was no control for the timing of the divorce.

Results indicated that subjects with divorced parents reported significantly greater functional, emotional, and attitudinal independence from their fathers as well as greater attitudinal independence from their mothers. Functional independence was defined as the degree to which one manages practical and personal affairs without parental help. Attitudinal independence was defined as the degree to which one has an image of oneself as distinct from parents and having one's own set of attitudes, beliefs, and values. The degree to which one experiences freedom from an excessive need for closeness, togetherness, approval, and emotional support in relation to one's mother and father was defined as emotional independence (Hoffman, 1984). Although parental divorce appeared to accelerate most forms of parent-child separation, it appeared to inhibit conflictual independence from fathers. Conflictual independence was

defined as the degree to which one experiences freedom from excessive guilt, mistrust, anxiety, anger, resentment, responsibility, and inhibition in relation to one's mother and father (Hoffman, 1984). No significant differences between the two groups were observed in regard to college adjustment.

A related study addressing psychological separation from parents, parental symptoms, and parental conflict and dominance in relation to presenting problems of college students was examined by Hoffman and Weiss (1987). A random sampling of 83 male and 107 female college students from intact families was used. A direct relation was found between the degree of interpersonal conflict in the family and intrapersonal distress among family members, as reported by the student. It was found that the greater the degree of conflictual dependence of the student on either or both parents, the more symptoms the student reported, both for himself or herself and for the parents.

#### Summary of the Literature

The young adult experience of parental divorce has been studied from various viewpoints. Although there was one study with contrasting results (Bhatt, 1989/1990), many studies (Bonkowski, 1989; Cain, 1989; Elliot, 1990; Hepworth et al., 1984; Morris, 1989; Packard-Garmirian, 1984/1985) have indicated that young adults experience loss when parents divorce. Gender differences in the experience of parental divorce have also been noted in several studies (Bianchi et al., 1987; Cooney et al., 1986; Farber et al., 1983;

Kaufmann, 1987/1988). The issue of psychological separation from parents was addressed by Lopez et al. (1988) and Hoffman and Weiss (1987).

Since feelings of loss were present in many of the studies, it was important to examine the young adult experience of parental separation and/or divorce in the context of loss. Pertinent considerations were the manner in which gender and psychological separation from parents impact depressive reactions.

## CHAPTER III

### DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### Method and Procedure

##### Subjects

The subjects for this study were undergraduate young adult college students attending either Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan, or Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Grand Valley State University, located in Allendale, Michigan (12 miles west of Grand Rapids), is a four-year public university with undergraduate and graduate programs. The winter semester 1992 enrollment was 11,856, with 4,991 male students and 6,865 female students. Most of the students (6,908) were from the Michigan counties surrounding Grand Valley. Students from other Michigan counties numbered 4,710, and 238 students were from out of state. There were 7,397 full-time students and 4,459 students who attended part time. The ethnic enrollment was as follows: 0.5% American Islander or Alaskan, 1.2% Asian or Pacific Islander, 1.5% Hispanic, 4.6% Black, 90.9% White, and 1.3% for which information was not provided. The student body was composed of 62.4% undergraduate students and 37.6% graduate students (Grand Valley State University, Office of the Registrar, 1992).



Western Michigan University, located in Kalamazoo, is also a four-year degree public university with undergraduate and graduate programs. The winter semester 1992 enrollment for on-campus classes was 22,671, with 10,926 male students and 11,745 female students. Most of the students (20,105) were residents of Michigan, and 1,084 students were from out of state. One thousand eighty-two individuals were foreign students. Of the 18,899 undergraduate students, 14,833 attended full time and 4,066 attended part time. The ethnic enrollment was as follows: 0.4% Native American, 0.9% Hispanic, 5.2% Black, 6.5% International, and 85.8% White and others (Western Michigan University, Office of Institutional Research, 1992).

The subjects in this research were young adults, defined in this study as individuals at least 18 years of age and younger than 24 years of age. Two groups were used, each composed of 40 young adults. One group consisted of young adults whose parents had separated and/or divorced in the preceding 3 years after having been married to each other at least 15 years. The other group, which served as a control group, consisted of young adults from intact families whose parents had been married to each other for at least 18 years and were currently married and living together.

### Procedures

Permission to conduct the research at Western Michigan University was received from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board of Western Michigan University. The Human Research Review Committee of Grand Valley State University granted permission to

conduct the research at Grand Valley State University.

Professors from a variety of disciplines (including psychology, sociology, education, religion, business, biology, geography, music, communication, philosophy, history, political science, and English) from both universities were asked by the researcher to take 10 minutes of class time to assist with the screening portion of the study. Thirteen professors at Western Michigan University and 12 professors at Grand Valley State University agreed to permit this research in their courses during the winter semester.

The researcher disbursed the Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form (Appendix A) to the cooperating professors. The Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form contained an explanation of the nature of the study, a statement of the rights of the participants, a consent agreement, and a survey to screen for participation in the study. In order to insure uniformity of screening, professors were given a sheet containing procedural directions (Appendix D). The professors followed the procedural directions, read the Cover Letter portion of the Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form aloud to the students, instructing willing participants to follow the directions on the forms. Professors collected all of the forms and returned them to the researcher.

Young adults who were willing to participate in the study while fitting the study criteria were identified by the Information Form portion of the Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form. Young adults selected for participation for the study were assigned a participant number. All young adults who were identified as

experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were included in the study. Because of the large number of young adults from intact families and the wish to obtain groups of similar size, computerized random sampling was used to obtain participants for the control group. The young adults who were selected for inclusion in the research were mailed a packet containing the Personal Data Survey (Appendix B), the Multiscore Depression Inventory (D. J. Berndt, 1986), the Psychological Separation Inventory (Hoffman, 1984) (Appendix C), the participant's copy of Consent (for participation in the study) (Appendix A), and a stamped, addressed return envelope. The survey and the instruments were identified by subject number to maintain anonymity. The instruments were randomly ordered in the packets. The time required for completion of the tests and the survey was approximately one hour. The young adults were asked to return the completed survey and instruments using the addressed envelope. If the packets were not received within one week after the date noted for return on the Personal Data Survey, the researcher called the students as a reminder to complete and return the measures.

In order to achieve larger sample sizes, the researcher repeated the research procedures during the spring semester. The researcher dispersed the Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form to 17 professors at Western Michigan University and 8 professors at Grand Valley State University for distribution in their classrooms. The above procedures were repeated. Young adults who were willing to participate in the study while fitting the study criteria were

identified by the Information Form portion of the Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form. The young adults selected for participation in the study were assigned a participant number. This included all young adults who were identified as experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. Because of the large number of young adults from intact families and the wish to obtain groups of similar size, computerized random sampling was again used to obtain the participants of the control group. The young adults who were selected for inclusion in the research were sent testing packets and the procedures described above were again followed.

In order to insure similar size and gender balance for each group, stratified random sampling was conducted on the returned test packets from young adults from intact families (the control group) for spring semester. First, the packets received during winter and spring semesters from young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were totaled by gender. The gender totals for packets received from the control group for winter semester were also noted. Next, the packets received from individuals from the control group for spring semester were counted and separated by gender. Computerized random sampling was then used for each gender from this group so that when added to the winter semester control group totals, the number and gender composition would equal that of the totals for both semesters for the group of young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. Thereby the group of young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce was equal in number and gender composition to the group of

young adults from intact families.

Subject anonymity was insured by keeping all materials in a locked area, by using code numbers on all documents, and by keeping the Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form (the document on which the subject's code number and name appeared) in a separate, locked location. The lower portion of the Personal Data Survey containing names and addresses of subjects wishing a summary of the study was removed from the Personal Data Survey when received by the researcher and was stored in a separate locked location.

### Independent Variables

Four independent variables were examined in this study.

#### Parental Marital Status

The parental marital status for all subjects was obtained from the Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form and was confirmed on the Personal Data Survey. Parental marital status was used to address Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4.

#### Gender

The gender of the subjects experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce was one of the independent variables. Gender information was obtained from the Personal Data Survey. Gender was used to address Hypothesis 2.

### Emotional Separation From Parents

The Emotional Separation scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory (Hoffman, 1984) was used to determine the emotional separation from parents for participants experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. The father and mother scales for emotional separation were combined to get a score of emotional separation from parents. Emotional separation from parents was used to address Hypothesis 3.

### Conflictual Separation From Parents

To determine the conflictual separation from parents for participants experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce, the Conflictual Separation scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory (Hoffman, 1984) was used. The father and mother Conflictual Separation scales were combined for a total score of conflictual separation from parents. Conflictual separation from parents was used to address Hypothesis 4.

### Dependent Variable--Depression

The dependent variable in the study was the amount of depression present in each of the subjects at the time of testing. The total score on the Multiscore Depression Inventory (D. J. Berndt, 1986) was used to determine the degree of depression present. This variable was used to address Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4.

## Information Forms

### Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form

The Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form (see Appendix A) was designed by the researcher for professors to distribute in university classrooms.

The purpose of the Cover Letter portion of the form was to inform potential participants of their rights and risks as participants in the study. The Cover Letter informed potential subjects regarding procedures, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The letter asked individuals willing to participate in the study to sign the Consent and complete the Information Form.

The Consent portion of the Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form provided a place for potential participants to indicate their understanding of the rights and risks involved in the study. Space was provided for subjects to sign and date the Consent. A space was also provided for an assignment of a participant number by the researcher.

The Information Form portion was used as a screening device to select subjects for participation in the study. The form provided space for each potential participant to record his or her name, address, telephone number, and age. The following questions were asked: if one's parents were married, if one's parents were married for at least 18 years (Cain, 1989), and if one's parent's were separated and/or divorced (Kaufmann, 1987/1988). Young adults whose parents were separated and/or divorced were asked to answer the

following additional questions: if one parents were married for at least 15 years before the separation or divorce, and if the separation or divorce occurred within the preceding 3 years (Cain, 1989).

### Personal Data Survey

The sheet containing the Personal Data Survey (Appendix B) provided a list of the contents of the study packet used in the study and instructions for taking and returning the tests. The Personal Data Survey, designed by the researcher, requested individuals to provide information on demographic variables including age, gender, and parental marital status. The survey included a portion for individuals wishing to receive a summary of the study to record their name and address. The form stated that this portion would be detached by the researcher and would be stored in a separate, locked location to insure confidentiality.

## Instrumentation

### Multiscore Depression Inventory

The Multiscore Depression Inventory (MDI) measured for severity of depression as well as specific aspects of depression. The MDI is a sensitive measure that detects subtle variations in milder forms of depression (D. J. Berndt, 1986). A self-report questionnaire, this inventory is comprised of 118 true-false items.

The MDI yields a total score indicating the respondent's total score for depression as well as scores on 10 subscales. The



subscales are: Low Energy Level, Guilt, Social Introversion, Irritability, Instrumental Helplessness, Cognitive Difficulty, Low Self-Esteem, Pessimism, Sad Mood, and Learned Helplessness (D. J. Berndt, 1986).

Studies on the Multiscore Depression Inventory using regression analyses (S. M. Berndt, Berndt, & Byars, 1983) have indicated that the Multiscore Depression Inventory scores can be used to predict equivalent scores on the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1967). From this analysis, it is possible to relate MDI scores to various levels of severity of depression as identified by Beck and Beck in 1972. The relationship between the MDI full-scale T scores and corresponding levels of severity of depression are as follows: MDI T score less than 51 would fall in the minimal depression category, a T score between 51 and 61 would indicate mild depression, a T score between 61 and 83 would indicate moderate depression, and a T score over 83 would indicate severe depression. These categories are to be used cautiously since neither the initial levels of depression identified by Beck and Beck (1972) nor the regression analysis by D. J. Berndt, Petzel, and Kaiser (1983) have been replicated. The MDI is not intended to make a diagnosis of affective disorder; but rather, it is intended to give a measure of severity of depressive symptomatology (D. J. Berndt, 1986).

Internal consistency reliability for the Multiscore Depression Inventory has been shown to be quite stable at either .96 or .97 (D. J. Berndt & Kaiser, 1980; D. J. Berndt, Kaiser, & van Aalst, 1982; D. J. Berndt, Petzel, & Berndt, 1980; D. J. Berndt et al.,

1983). Most of the subscale reliabilities have internal consistency reliabilities in the .80s, with the exception of the Low Energy Level, which had reliabilities in the low .90s (D. J. Berndt, 1986).

### Psychological Separation Inventory

Psychological separation from parents was measured by the psychological Separation Inventory (PSI), developed by Hoffman (1984). The PSI (see Appendix C) consists of 138 items that participants respond to in a 5-point Likert format from not at all true of me to very true of me. Sixty-nine of the items are worded to yield information about psychological separation from father and 69 items refer to separation from mother.

Four scales (for both father and mother dimensions) are derived from the items. (1) Functional Independence is the degree to which one manages practical and personal affairs without parental help. (2) Attitudinal Independence is the degree to which one has an image of oneself as distinct from parents and having one's own set of attitudes, beliefs, and values. (3) Emotional Independence is the degree to which one is set free from an excessive need for closeness, togetherness, approval, and emotional support in relation to one's mother and father. (4) Conflictual Independence is the degree to which one is free from excessive guilt, mistrust, anxiety, anger, resentment, responsibility, and inhibition in relation to one's mother and father (Hoffman, 1984).

The four scales are not to be added together for a total psychological separation score since the scales are not all positively

correlated. However, mother and father scores for each of the four independence scales may be combined into a total independence from parents score for each scale. For example, the score for Emotional Independence from mother and the score for Emotional Independence from father may be combined for a score of Emotional Independence from parents (Hoffman, 1984).

Psychological separation from parents is defined in this study as an individual's movement in the direction of autonomy and self-direction, a sense of responsibility for the self and disentanglement from parental control, developing in the context of connection, while maintaining and modifying relationships with parents. Hoffman (1992) considered the Emotional Independence scale and the Conflictual Independence scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory to be the best measures for psychological separation from parents, when viewing psychological separation in the context of this definition.

The PSI has an acceptable factor structure, internal consistency (coefficient alpha) across subscales ranging from .84 to .92, and test-retest stability of .69 to .96 (Hoffman, 1984). Validity has been established by correlations with the Personal Adjustment subscale of the Adjective Check List and by global ratings with indices of relational and academic adjustment (Hoffman, 1984).

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions for this study were the following: In what manner are young adults affected by the recent separation or divorce of their parents? Is this group of young adults more

depressed than young adults with an intact family where there has been no separation and/or divorce? Do female young adults encountering recent parental separation and/or divorce experience a greater loss than their male counterparts? Does the degree to which a young adult is psychologically separated from his or her parents correspond to the amount of loss he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce?

#### Hypothesis 1

Young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce will experience significantly higher levels of depression (measured by the total score on the Multiscore Depression Inventory) than young adults from intact families. The comparison of the mean scores for depression for each group was tested for significance using an independent  $t$  test with two-tailed probability to test this hypothesis. It was expected that significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) would be found between the levels of depression for the two groups. This hypothesis addressed the research questions pertaining to the manner young adults are affected by recent parental separation and/or divorce and if this group of young adults are more depressed than young adults with intact families.

#### Hypothesis 2

Young adult females experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce will experience significantly higher levels of depression (measured by the total score on the Multiscore Depression

Inventory) than young adult males experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. An independent  $t$  test with two-tailed probability was used to test this hypothesis. It was expected that a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) would be found between the depression levels of young adult females and young adult males experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. This hypothesis addressed the research question asking if female young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce experience a greater amount of loss than their male counterparts.

### Hypothesis 3

The degree to which a young adult is emotionally psychologically separated from his or her parents (measured by the total of the Emotional Independence scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory) will not significantly correlate with the amount of depression he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce (measured by the total score on the Multiscore Depression Inventory). A Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test this hypothesis. It was expected that there would not be a significant correlation ( $p < .05$ ) between emotional psychological separation from parents and level of depression. This hypothesis addressed the research question which asked if the degree to which a young adult is psychologically separated from his or her parents corresponds to the amount of loss he or she experiences following recent parental divorce and/or separation. Hoffman (1992) considered the Emotional Independence scale and the Conflictual

Independence scale to be the best measures on the Psychological Separation Inventory for psychological separation as defined in this study.

#### Hypothesis 4

The degree to which a young adult is conflictually psychologically separated from his or her parents (measured by the total of the Conflictual Independence scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory) will not significantly correlate with the amount of depression he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce (measured by the total score on the Multiscore Depression Inventory). A Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test this hypothesis. It was expected that no significant correlation ( $p < .05$ ) would be found between conflictual psychological separation from parents and level of depression. This hypothesis addressed the research question which asked if the degree to which a young adult is psychologically separated from his or her parents corresponds to the amount of loss he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce. Hoffman (1992) considered the Conflictual Independence scale and the Emotional Independence scale to be the best measures on the Psychological Separation Inventory for psychological separation as defined in this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Sample Description

A total of 1,326 students were screened during the winter semester, that is, 1,326 students were present in the classrooms when the instructors distributed the Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form. Eight hundred and fifty-four (64.4%) students completed the Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form. Of this group, 30 (3.5%) met the criteria for young adults experiencing recent parental divorce, while 554 (64.9%) met the criteria for young adults from intact families. A total of 270 (31.6%) were classified as "other." All the young adults experiencing recent parental divorce were assigned a participant number and were sent testing packets. Computerized random selection was used to obtain 30 young adults from the intact families group. Testing packets were also sent to these young adults.

A total of 829 students were screened during spring semester and 441 (53.2%) completed the form. Of this group, 19 (4.3%) met the criteria for young adults experiencing recent parental divorce and 223 (50.6%) met the criteria for the young adults from intact families. A total of 199 (45.1%) were classified as other. Testing packets were sent to the 19 young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. Testing packets were also sent to 40

randomly selected young adults from the 223 young adults from intact families.

Combining winter and spring semesters, a total of 2,155 students were screened for participation in the study. Of this group, 1,295 (60.1%) completed the Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form. Of the 1,295 students who completed the form, 49 (3.8%) were young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce (parents were separated and/or divorced in the past 3 years after having been married at least 15 years), 777 (60%) were from intact families (young adults whose mother and father have been married at least 18 years and are currently married and living together), and 469 (36.2%) were classified as other. Other includes individuals who are not young adults, whose parents have been divorced more than three years, and individuals who have a deceased parent.

The sample obtained from each semester as well as the combined totals gained from the classroom screening are described in Table 1. "Separated/divorced" denote young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. "Intact" indicates young adults from intact families. "Other" indicates students not fitting the criteria for the above categories. This includes individuals older than 23, individuals whose parents have been divorced longer than 3 years, and individuals who experienced the death of a parent.

The response rates to the testing packets for each semester and combined totals are indicated in Table 2. During the winter semester, of the 60 testing packets sent, a total of 47 (78.3%) completed test packets were returned to the researcher by mail. Of the 30



Table 1  
Number of Students Sampled for Winter Semester,  
Spring Semester, and Total

Category	Winter semester	Spring semester	Total
Screened	1,326	829	2,155
Information forms completed	854	441	1,295
Separated/divorced	30	19	49
Intact	554	223	777
Other	270	199	469

Table 2  
Response Rates to the Testing Packets for Winter  
Semester, Spring Semester, and Total

Category	Winter semester	Spring semester	Total
Packets sent	60	59	119
Separated/divorced	30	19	49
Intact	30	40	70
Packets returned	47	37	84
Separated/divorced	26	14	40
Intact	21	23	44

test packets sent to young adults experiencing parental separation and/or divorce, 26 (86.7%), representing 23 females and 3 males, were returned to the researcher by mail with completed testing information. Of the 30 test packets sent to young adults from intact families, 21 (70%), representing 17 females and 4 males, were returned.

For the spring semester, of the 59 packets sent, a total of 37 (62.7%) test packets were returned to the researcher. Of the 19 packets sent to young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce, 14 (73.7%), representing 11 females and 3 males, were returned to the researcher by mail. Of the 40 test packets sent to young adults from intact families, 23 (57.5%), representing 20 females and 3 males, were returned.

For winter and spring semesters together, 119 testing packets were sent, 49 to young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce and 70 to young adults from intact families. A total of 84 (70.6%) were returned to the researcher. Of the 49 sent to subjects experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce, 40 (81.6%) were returned. Of the 70 sent to subjects from intact families, 44 (62.9%) were returned.

In order to insure similar size and gender balance for each group, stratified random sampling was conducted on the returned test packets from young adults from intact families (the control group) for spring semester. First, the packets received during winter and spring semesters from young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were totaled by gender (40 packets

representing 34 females and 6 males). The packets received from the control group for winter semester were also totaled by gender (21 packets representing 17 females and 4 males). It was noted that in order to obtain equal group size and gender balance to the group of young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce, 19 individuals (17 females and 2 males) were needed to complete the control group. The packets received from individuals from the control group for spring semester were counted and separated by gender (23 packets representing 20 females and 3 males). Computerized random sampling was then used on each gender segment from this group. From the 23 packets (20 females and 3 males) returned spring semester from the control group, 19 packets (17 females and 2 males) were sampled out for inclusion in the study. The 4 remaining packets (3 females and 1 male) were stored in a locked location and were not used in the research. Thereby the group of young adult participants experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce was equal in number (40) and gender composition (34 females and 6 males) to the group of young adult participants from intact families.

The number and gender of subjects acquired for the study during winter and spring semesters are presented in Table 3. The figures indicating the intact group for spring represent the totals after the stratified random sampling.

The age means and standard deviations for the entire sample and for young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce and young adults from intact families are presented in Table 4. Age ranged from 18 through 23 years of age and was controlled by

Table 3  
Descriptive Sample Characteristics for Winter  
Semester, Spring Semester, and Total

Variable	Winter semester	Spring semester	Total
Separated/divorced	26	14	40
Female	23	11	34
Male	3	3	6
Intact	21	19	40
Female	17	17	34
Male	4	2	6

Table 4  
Means and Standard Deviations for Age for  
Entire Sample and Research Groups

Research group	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Entire sample	20.20	1.43
Females	20.28	1.44
Males	19.75	1.29
Separated/divorced group	20.20	1.52
Females	20.18	1.59
Males	20.33	1.21
Intact group	20.20	1.34
Females	20.38	1.30
Males	19.17	1.17

definition in this research. The mean age for the entire sample was 20.20. The mean age for females was 20.28, while the mean age for males was 19.75. The mean age for young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce was 20.20. For this group, the mean age for females was 20.18 and for males, 20.33. The mean age for young adults from intact families was 20.20. For this group, the mean age for females was 20.38 and for males, 19.17.

### Results

Hypothesis 1 stated in null form was: Young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce will not experience significantly higher levels of depression (measured by the total score on the Multiscore Depression Inventory) than young adults from intact families. The means and standard deviations for the depression variables measured by the Multiscore Depression Inventory (MDI) for the young adults from intact families and young adults experiencing parental separation and/or divorce are presented in Table 5. Comparison of mean differences between groups on the depression variable resulted in statistically significant differences for the total score ( $t = -2.67, p = .009$ ) and rejection of the null hypothesis. The mean score for the group of young adults with intact parents (46.2) was in the range of none or minimal for severity of depression. The mean score for the group of young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce (51.7) was in the range of mild for severity of depression (D. J. Berndt, 1986); therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. The differences in the

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of Depression Variables (MDI)  
for Young Adults From Intact Families and Young Adults  
With Separated and/or Divorced Parents

Subscale	Intact parents		Separated/divorced parents		<u>t</u>
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	
Total score	46.2	9.3	51.7	8.9	-2.67**
Low Energy	50.1	8.1	52.0	10.7	-0.75
Cognitive Difficulty	47.0	8.2	50.9	9.7	-1.94
Guilt	49.5	10.0	52.6	7.9	-1.51
Low Self-Esteem	48.3	7.8	50.0	7.6	-0.93
Social Introversion	50.0	10.0	49.8	10.8	-0.37
Pessimism	44.2	8.3	49.2	9.3	-2.55*
Irritability	45.3	7.4	51.6	11.5	-2.91**
Sad Mood	46.7	9.3	49.8	11.2	-1.31
Instrumental Helplessness	49.0	10.7	55.0	14.8	-2.07*
Learned Helplessness	46.4	8.5	49.8	14.3	-1.27

\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ .

scores cannot reasonably be attributed to chance and the causal factor stated in the hypothesis may possibly explain the difference.

Statistically significant differences between the groups were also found for the following depression subscales: Pessimism ( $t = -2.55$ ,  $p = .013$ ), Irritability ( $t = -2.91$ ,  $p = .005$ ), and

Instrumental Helplessness ( $t = -2.07$ ,  $p = .042$ ). Differences between groups approached significance for the subscale Cognitive Difficulty ( $t = -1.94$ ,  $p = .056$ ).

Hypothesis 2 stated in null form was: Young adult females experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce will not experience significantly higher levels of depression (measured by the total score of the Multiscore Depression Inventory) than young adult males experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. The means and standard deviations of the depression variables reported on the Multiscore Depression Inventory for female and male young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce are presented in Table 6. No significant difference was observed when young adult males and females experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were compared using the  $t$  test method with two-tailed probability on the total score on the depression measure ( $t = -0.74$ ,  $p = .467$ ) and, thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. The mean scores for the group of females (51.2) and the mean scores for the group of males (54.1) were in the range of mild for severity of depression (D. J. Berndt, 1986).

Additional analysis indicated the groups were statistically significantly different on the following subscales: Social Introversion ( $t = 2.45$ ,  $p = .019$ ) and Sad Mood ( $t = -2.03$ ,  $p = .050$ ).

Females did not score significantly more depressed than males for total score on the MDI and males scored more introverted and sad on the subscales; therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Table 6  
Means and Standard Deviations of Depression Variables (MDI)  
for Female and Male Young Adults With Separated  
and/or Divorced Parents

Subscale	Female ( <u>n</u> = 34)		Male ( <u>n</u> = 6)		<u>t</u>
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	
Total score	51.2	8.9	54.1	9.9	-0.74
Low Energy	52.5	10.9	48.8	10.0	0.77
Cognitive Difficulty	51.0	10.2	50.1	6.3	0.20
Guilt	52.2	8.2	54.6	5.5	-0.71
Low Self-Esteem	49.6	7.8	52.2	7.1	-0.77
Social Introversion	48.2	9.7	59.2	12.8	-2.45*
Pessimism	48.4	9.5	53.8	7.7	-1.33
Irritability	52.2	11.9	47.7	8.7	0.90
Sad Mood	48.3	9.5	58.0	17.3	-2.03*
Instrumental Helplessness	54.7	14.8	56.3	16.1	-0.25
Learned Helplessness	49.7	15.3	49.8	5.9	-0.02

\*p ≤ .05.

Hypothesis 3 stated in the alternate form was: The degree to which a young adult is emotionally psychologically separated from his or her parents (measured by the total of the Emotional Independence scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory) will significantly correlate with the amount of depression he or she experiences



following recent parental separation and/or divorce (measured by the total score on the Multiscore Depression Inventory). The combined mother and father Emotional Independence scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory did not significantly correlate with the total score on the Multiscore Depression Inventory for young adults experiencing recent parental divorce and/or separation ( $r = .047$ ,  $p = .772$ ) and, thus, the alternate hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 stated in the alternate form was: The degree to which a young adult is conflictually psychologically separated from his or her parents (measured by the total of the Conflictual Independence scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory) will significantly correlate with the amount of depression he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce (measured by the total score on the Multiscore Depression Inventory). The combined mother and father Conflictual Independence scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory did not significantly correlate with the total score on the Multiscore Depression Inventory for young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce ( $r = -.104$ ,  $p = .524$ ) and, thus, the alternate hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Interpretation of Analyses

The purpose of this study was to examine the young adult experience of parental separation and/or divorce in the context of loss. Pertinent considerations were the manner in which gender and psychological separation from parents impact depressive reactions. The research questions for the study were: In what manner are young adults affected by the recent separation or divorce of their parents? Is this group of young adults more depressed than young adults with an intact family where there has been no separation or divorce? Do female young adults encountering recent parental separation and/or divorce experience a greater loss than their male counterparts? Does the degree to which a young adult is psychologically separated from his or her parents correspond to the amount of loss he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce?

#### Hypothesis 1

It was hypothesized that young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce would experience significantly higher levels of depression than young adults from intact families. A comparison of the mean differences between young adults with

intact parents and young adults with recently separated and/or divorced parents was tested using the independent  $t$  test with two-tailed probability. It was expected that a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) would be found. Statistical significance was found ( $t = -2.67$ ,  $p = .009$ ), indicating for this sample, young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce showed significantly higher levels of depressive symptomatology as measured on the Multiscore Depression Inventory than young adults from intact families. The mean score for the group of young adults with intact parents (46.2) was in the range of none or minimal for severity of depression. The mean score for the group of young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce (51.7) was in the range of mild for severity of depression (D. J. Berndt, 1986).

Additional analysis was performed examining the subscales of the Multiscore Depression Inventory using the independent  $t$  test with two-tailed probability. This analysis indicated that three of the subscales showed significant differences between the two groups and a fourth subscale approached significance. The scales indicating significant differences were: Irritability ( $t = -2.91$ ,  $p = .005$ ), Pessimism ( $t = -2.55$ ,  $p = .013$ ), and Instrumental Helplessness ( $t = -2.07$ ,  $p = .042$ ). Differences in Cognitive Difficulty approached significance ( $t = -1.94$ ,  $p = .056$ ).

Young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce scored significantly higher in Irritability than young adults from intact families ( $t = -2.91$ ,  $p = .005$ ). This indicated that for this sample, young adults experiencing recent parental

separation and/or divorce were more likely to be irritable, possessing a quick temper and intolerance of others (D. J. Berndt, 1986) than young adults from intact families.

The results also indicated that young adults in this sample experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce scored significantly higher in Pessimism than young adults from intact families ( $t = -2.55$ ,  $p = .013$ ). According to D. J. Berndt (1986), this indicated that for this sample, young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce had a more pessimistic outlook, and perhaps also more feelings of hopelessness than young adults from intact families.

Young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce also scored significantly higher in Instrumental Helplessness ( $t = -2.07$ ,  $p = .042$ ). This indicated that for this sample, young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were more likely to make an active attempt to elicit help or sympathy from others. They were also more likely to be attuned to social reinforcement and to find it lacking. Because of this, they may have wished to manipulate others to be more caring (D. J. Berndt, 1986) than young adults from intact families.

## Hypothesis 2

It was hypothesized that young adult females experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce would experience significantly higher levels of depression than young adult males experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. A comparison of the

mean differences between female young adults with recently separated and/or divorced parents and male young adults with recently separated and/or divorced parents was tested using the independent  $t$  test with two-tailed probability. The procedure indicated that no statistically significant differences existed between the mean differences of young adult females experiencing recent separation and/or divorce and young adult males experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce. It is to be noted, however, that the large difference between the gender sample sizes (34 females and 6 males) may have influenced this finding. This results in tentativeness in making inferences and interpretation about the results.

Additional  $t$  tests were used to compare the two groups using the means of the subscales of the Multiscore Depression Inventory. Males experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce scored significantly higher on Social Introversion ( $t = 2.45$ ,  $p = .019$ ) and Sad Mood ( $t = -2.03$ ,  $p = .019$ ) than their female counterparts. This indicated that for this sample, male young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce experienced significantly more feelings of social withdrawal and isolation than young adult female counterparts. Social Introversion on the Multiscore Depression Inventory represents a stable or trait equivalent to the depressive phenomenon of social withdrawal (D. J. Berndt, 1986). The results also indicated that for this sample, males experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce also experienced significantly greater feelings of sadness than their female counterparts.

Although the hypothesis did not directly address the subscales of the Multiscore Depression Inventory, the results on the Social Introversion and Sad Mood subscales were the opposite of what may have been anticipated by the researcher. The researcher had hypothesized that female young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce would experience higher levels of depression than their male counterparts. However, as noted above, the large difference between the gender sample sizes may have influenced these findings.

### Hypothesis 3

It was hypothesized that the degree to which a young adult is emotionally psychologically separated from his or her parents would not significantly correlate with the amount of depression he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce. A Pearson product-moment correlation was performed to test this hypothesis. It was not expected that a significant correlation would be found between the amount of emotional separation from parents and the level of depression. A significant correlation was not found. This indicated that for this sample, the amount of emotional independence from parents these young adults experienced did not correlate with the level of depression the young adults experienced during parental separation and/or divorce. Hoffman (1991) considered the Emotional Independence scale and the Conflictual Independence scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory to be the best measures for psychological separation, as defined in this study.

Therefore, since there was no correlation for emotional independence, it can be concluded that for this sample, the amount of psychological separation from parents the young adults experienced did not correlate with the level of depression the young adult experienced during parental separation and/or divorce.

#### Hypothesis 4

It was hypothesized that the degree to which a young adult is conflictually psychologically separated from his or her parents would not significantly correlate with the amount of depression he or she experiences following recent parental separation and/or divorce. A Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test this hypothesis. It was expected for young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce that a significant correlation would not be found between the amount of conflictual independence from parents and the young adults' level of depression. A significant correlation was not found. This indicated that for this sample of young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce, the amount of conflictual independence from parents they experienced did not correlate with the level of depression. Hoffman (1991) considered the Emotional Independence scale and the Conflictual Independence scale on the Psychological Separation Inventory to be the best measures for psychological separation as defined in this study. Therefore, since there was no correlation for conflictual independence, it can be concluded that for this sample, the amount of psychological separation from parents the young adults

experienced did not correlate with the level of depression the young adult experienced during parental separation and/or divorce.

### Discussion

As supported by previous research (Bonkowski, 1989; Cain, 1989; Elliot, 1990; Morris, 1989; Packard-Garmirian, 1984/1985), young adults in this study encountering recent parental separation and/or divorce experienced loss. Unlike the previous studies, this study included a control group and sizable sample ( $n = 40$ ). The group of young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce scored a significantly higher level of depression than young adults from intact families. Although the level of depression experienced by the young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce was within the range of mild severity (D. J. Berndt, 1986), the fact remains this group was significantly more depressed than the young adults from intact families. Even though a clinical depression was not present, this should not be understood as meaning these young adults do not need services. It is important that depression in mild forms be addressed by the counseling psychologist so the depression does not escalate or remain unresolved.

The popular myth encouraging parents to "wait until the children are grown" before separation, has, therefore, been misleading. The myth implies that if parents wait until their children are grown and out of the home, the effects of the divorce will be negligible. In this study, the fact that young adults who experienced parental separation and/or divorce were significantly more depressed than



young adults from intact families disputes this myth. It is evidenced by this study that young adults experience parental separation and/or divorce as loss. In labeling this experience as loss, young adults may be better able to identify and understand their feelings. This understanding may help to liberate the young adult's ability and freedom to mourn without the feelings of childishness or guilt. The young adult may be able to recognize more freely the extent or depth of his or her feelings instead of wondering if he or she is being childish in feeling sad about the divorce or guilty about feelings of anger or helplessness. This realization would allow the young adult to grieve his or her loss (Packard-Garmirian, 1984/1985).

It was also indicated in this study that the amount of psychological separation a young adult experiences from his or her parents does not correlate with the amount of depression or loss he or she experiences when encountering parental separation and/or divorce. It is important to view psychological separation from parents as an individual's movement in the direction of autonomy and self-direction, a sense of responsibility for the self and disentanglement from parental control developing within the context of connection, while maintaining and modifying relationships with parents. As adolescents and young adults mature and become more autonomous, an important connection to parents remains. This relationship can play a vital role for the young adult. Bowlby (1988) conceptualized parents as providing a "secure base" (p. 11) to provide emotional equilibrium for the young adult. In a similar manner, Kegan (1982)

conceptualized parents and home providing a "holding" (p. 186) environment for young adults, providing a stable interpersonal context that acknowledges the nature of the past self, thereby helping to launch the individual to the next higher level of human development.

Although additional research is needed to clarify the complex relationships between autonomy and attachment for young adults, college student affairs staff and counselors need to be aware that the experience of parental separation and/or divorce can be a source of loss for young adults. Efforts should be made to identify this population and to offer support and counseling. These young adults could be easily identified on enrollment forms and assistance could be offered by means of individual or group counseling.

In regard to all young adults, college student affairs personal and counselors need to be aware that parents can be an important source of support for their young adult children. Attempts to promote separation from parents may even have negative effects on adjustment (Lopez et al., 1986). Parents need reassurance that they can respond to their young adult's requests for support without contributing to maladaptive development. It would be helpful if they could appreciate the importance of the "remaining-in-place" (p. 129) function they can provide their children (Kegan, 1982). As young adult children enter the rigors and adjustments of college life, it is important that parents stay in place so young adults can draw on the security of the past and present in order to progress developmentally into the future (Kegan, 1982). This includes being consistently available to young adult children in order to support

them in any way their needs may require. It means providing a "secure base" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 11) from which the young adult can make sorties out into the world and to which he or she can return, secure in the knowledge that he or she will be welcomed, nourished physically and emotionally, reassured if frightened, and comforted if distressed (Bowlby, 1988).

Seminars for students and their parents during orientation or parent weekends could provide opportunities for relaying revised views of parent-young adult relationships. Parents could then consider appropriate ways of supporting their college-age children during a time when many parents themselves may be experiencing stress relating to time demands, work, marital difficulties, and their own aging process (Kenny, 1990). Students could be educated in freshman seminar courses regarding the process of psychological separation in the context of connection. Young adults could learn they are not expected to be instantly independent just because they are 18 years of age. They could be taught ways to utilize their connections with their parents to assist them in the transition to college life. Such a seminar theme may be especially valuable to male students because they are stereotypically taught not to continue valuing relationship activity while moving toward autonomy.

In this study, young adult females experiencing parental separation and/or divorce were not found to be more depressed than their male counterparts. In fact, additional analysis showed that males experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce experienced significantly more social introversion and sad mood than the female

group. This suggests that the young adult male experience of parental separation and/or divorce ought not to be ignored or discounted on the basis of gender.

The results of this study may indicate that any kind of predictions of the effects of parental divorce that exclude a private interpretive dimension may not be possible. In other words, the results indicated that one cannot assume that for young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce the degree of psychological separation from parents or gender can predict the degree of depression. This is a loose confirmation for the fact that the actual level of depression that a young adult might experience in the event of parental divorce is not necessarily going to be a function of certain expectable features that could be predicted (Kegan, 1992).

In order to more fully understand the experience of parental separation and/or divorce, it would be helpful to view the experience from a constructivist perspective. This perspective emphasizes that individuals construct their own reality and meanings of events and experiences. Therefore, it is important that the individual's private or personal interpretation of events and circumstances be understood. Assumptions ought not to be made that there will necessarily be a causal relationship between an external event and an internal reaction. In other words, what a divorce means to a young adult, or a child at any age, will in strong measure be a function of the way in which an individual experiences or interprets the

meaning of the divorce and the various things that are connected to the divorce (Kegan, 1992).

### Limitations

Although two groups of 40 young adults each were examined in this study, the results can be generalized only to young adult college students attending universities with similar ethnic and cultural composition as those studied. Larger more heterogeneous groups could make the study generalizable to a larger population.

The results of this research indicated young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were significantly more depressed than young adults from intact families. However, individual situations were not considered. For example, the following situations or factors were not controlled: the effect of past and current relationships with each parent, the effect of the divorce on the young adult's financial situation, the effect of religious orientation, and the effect of availability of a support system. The participants' private or personal interpretations of the divorce and events surrounding it were not considered. For example, some individuals might focus on the loss of the valued other person(s); some might focus on the loss to one's own self, including integrity and self-esteem. Others might experience the loss from a more existential perspective and might focus on the loss of meaning in a more fundamental nature experiencing the loss of the way one expected the world to be. The different ways various kinds of depression or loss might be experienced were not addressed in this

study (Kegan, 1992). These factors and others point to the need for more internal or qualitative approach to the subject.

Females experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were not found to be significantly more depressed in this research than their male counterparts. However, the large difference between the gender sample sizes for young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce may have influenced the findings. This results in tentativeness in making inferences and interpretations about the results. The low response rate for males may be confirmation of the fact that males are taught to be less relational and more autonomous than females; and therefore, they did not respond to the survey. This may be evidence of how burdened males are because they are taught not to share and, therefore, carry a heavier load internally.

Given feminist relationship theory (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1984, 1986; Surrey, 1991) and recent research (Cooney et al., 1986; Kaufmann, 1987/1988), one might assume parental separation and/or divorce would have a more profound effect upon females. However, the finding of this study as well as Bianchi et al. (1987) underlines the fact that additional study in this area is needed. This study did not look beyond the quantitative degree of depression in males and females. With a different kind of methodology, one might be able to distinguish differences in the nature of the depression. There might be within those differing natures a range of intensities that both men and women experience (Kegan, 1992).

### Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should address the methodological limitations of this study. It is important to determine whether the findings for this group of college students can be generalized to a more culturally and social-economically diverse group of young adults. Studies using large numbers of young adults from various socio-economic backgrounds and cultures, including young adults who choose not to attend college, would be helpful.

Future research should also include more in-depth, personal exploration of the issues involved. In-depth interviews would generate more information and experiences pertinent to understanding the young adult experience of parental separation and/or divorce. Factors such as past and current relationships with each parent, financial issues, religious factors, and current avenues of support should be addressed. In order to more fully understand the effect of the divorce, one needs to understand how the divorce has been experienced by the young adult. One can then begin to understand what the divorce means for that person.

In order to address the difference between the female and male experience of parental separation and/or divorce, larger and equal gender sample sizes should be used. It would be helpful in future studies to look beyond the quantitative degree of depression in males and females in order to distinguish differences in the nature of the depression.

It would also be interesting to learn how various personality styles of young adults affect the experience and meanings made of parental separation and/or divorce. For example, in what manner would passive dependent young adults experience parental loss differently than passive independent young adults?

Future research could also focus on the young adult experience of parental separation and/or divorce in a longitudinal study. This would involve contacting the young adults at various time intervals and repeating research questions and measures. Such studies have been accomplished for children under the age of 18 (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989), but not for young adults or adults.

Reviewers of existing research concerning children and divorce (Emery, 1988; Kurdek, 1983) have made recommendations for conceptual revisions. The following recommendations have been adapted to the young adult experience of parental divorce from a constructivist point of view.

First, divorce needs to be viewed as a multilevel phenomenon whose effect upon young adults is influenced by meanings the young adult holds of the divorce as well as certain factors and the meaning the young adult attaches to factors such as: social supports available to the single-parent family, cultural attitudes toward divorce, interparental relationships, cultural attitudes toward divorce, interparental relations after separation, and the young adult's capacities for dealing with stress.

Second, it is necessary for divorce to be seen as an ongoing process, involving changes in the young adult's relations with each



parent, siblings, and relatives; possible disruption of the mutual attachment between the parent and the young adult; parent's modeling of ineffective conflict resolution strategies or aggressive behavior; and altered parenting styles. Since these changes begin at separation, it is important that attention be directed to the time beginning with the separation.

Third, adjustment to parental divorce needs to be viewed as a complex mixture of feelings, thoughts, and meanings made by the young adult regarding parental conflict, separation from the non-custodial parent, and various life changes (may be loss of financial support, family home, parental emotional support, and increased parental demands).

Fourth, a constructivist, developmental and life-cycle perspective needs to be used in examining the young adult's adjustment to parental divorce. A reaction to divorce considered appropriate at one developmental stage may be maladaptive for one at another stage. In addition, because family relationships are embedded in a larger social context, the effects of separation and divorce may be related to developmental transitions of the parents and the young adults.

Fifth, the separation and divorce adjustment process of the parents and the young adults must be considered reciprocal. The adjustment of the parents and the young adults are mutually supportive in optimal cases. However, in other situations, a young adult's ability to adapt to divorce-related changes may be complicated by parental pathology. Chronic, problematic responses of the

young adult may also increase interparental conflict and delay resolution of the divorce on emotional levels.

### Summary and Conclusions

This study examined the young adult experience of recent parental separation and/or divorce. It explored how gender and psychological separation from parents interact with depression when young adults encounter parental separation and/or divorce. The research indicated that young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were significantly more depressed than young adults from intact families. Females experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were not found to be more depressed than their male counterparts. The degree to which the young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce were psychologically separated from their parents did not correlate with the amount of depression the young adults experienced.

Young adults are affected by the separation and divorce of their parents. Parents as well as college mental health workers need to be aware of this so the needs of the young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce can be addressed. Further study is needed to better understand the internal and personal experience of the young adult encountering parental separation and/or divorce, the differences for female and male young adults experiencing recent parental separation and/or divorce, and the relationship between autonomy and attachment for young adults.

## APPENDICES

Appendix A  
Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Form

**COVER LETTER**

This is an experimental research study being conducted in order to learn more about young adults and their relationships with their parents. Participation is voluntary and you are free to discontinue participation at any time. Participation in the research or lack of participation will have no impact on the relationship between you and any institution of higher education in the State of Michigan or agents therein.

If you decide to participate, approximately one hour of your time will be required. A packet will be mailed to you containing a brief survey and two paper and pencil measures. One measure will require you to answer "true" or "false" to observations about yourself. The other measure will require you to rank on a scale of 1 to 5 aspects relating to your relationship with your mother and your father. You will be asked to complete the survey and the measures and return them a stamped addressed envelope which will be included in the packet.

Confidentiality will be assured through the use of code numbers, and no information that personally identifies you will be released at any time. Consent forms will be kept entirely separate from other materials, so your identity will not be connected to the completed test instruments.

The researcher does not anticipate any risk or discomfort for participants. In the unlikely event discomfort occurs and persists after the completion of the paper and pencil tests, you may contact me and I will supply you with possible referrals.

The Information Form on the following page will be used as a screening device for participation in the study. Because of the nature of the research, certain criteria must be met for participation and random selection will be used. If you do not receive a packet in the mail in the next two weeks, you were not chosen to participate in the study.

If requested, a brief summary of the findings will be sent to you after the study has been completed. If you have any questions or concerns relating to the research, you may contact me at Grand Valley Counseling Center, 895-3266. Thank you.

Mary Oppenhuizen, M.A.

**CONSENT**

If you are willing to participate in the study, please sign and date as indicated and complete the following page.

I understand my rights as a subject which are described in the Cover Letter above and I agree to participate in this study.

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

---

Participant  
Number  
(Assigned by  
Researcher)

**COVER LETTER, CONSENT, AND INFORMATION FORM, CONT.****INFORMATION FORM**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.  
Please provide the following information.

PLEASE PRINT

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Current Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE CHECK "YES" OR "NO"

1.    ☐ YES    ☐ NO    Are your parents currently married to each other?
2.    ☐ YES    ☐ NO    Have your parents been married to each other for  
at least 18 years?
3.    ☐ YES    ☐ NO    Are your parents separated or divorced from each  
other?

IF YOUR ANSWER TO #3 is "YES", PLEASE COMPLETE #4 AND #5.

4.    ☐ YES    ☐ NO    Were your parents married to each other for at  
least 15 years before they separated or divorced?
5.    ☐ YES    ☐ NO    Did your parents' separation or divorce occur  
within the past three years?

If the criteria are met for your participation in this study, you  
will receive a packet in the mail within the next two weeks  
containing research instruments with instructions for completion.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact  
Mary Oppenhuizen at 895-3266. Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix B  
Personal Data Survey

Participant  
Number

Dear Participant,

Thank-you for agreeing to take part in this research. Enclosed please find: (1) your copy of the Cover Letter and signed Consent; (2) the MDI; (3) the Psychological Separation Inventory; and (4) a stamped addressed envelope.

Please complete the Personal Data Survey below. Read the directions and complete the MDI and the Psychological Separation Inventory. Please return the three instruments by **(date indicated)**.

Thank-you for your cooperation.  
Mary Oppenhuizen, M.A.

### PERSONAL DATA SURVEY

1. Are your parents currently married and living together or separated or divorced? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your current age? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

-----

A summary of the study will be sent to you, if desired. However, it may be nearly a year before the results are compiled. If you desire a summary, please supply the name and address where the summary should be mailed. (In order to protect your anonymity, this section will be removed and stored separately.)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Appendix C  
Psychological Separation Inventory

## PSYCHOLOGICAL SEPARATION INVENTORY

COPYRIGHT 1984

Instructions: The following list of statements describes different aspects of students' relationships with both their mother and father. Imagine a scale ranging from 1 to 5 that tells how well each statement applies to you. In the space next to the statement, please enter a number from "1" (Not at all true of me) to "5" (Very true of me). If the statement does not apply enter "1". Please be completely honest. Your answers are entirely confidential and will be useful only if they accurately describe you.

- | Not at all<br>true of me<br>1 | A little bit<br>true of me<br>2 | Moderately<br>true of me<br>3  | Quite a bit<br>true of me<br>4 | Very<br>true of me<br>5 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ___                           | 1.                              | I like to show my friends pictures of my mother.                                 |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 2.                              | Sometimes my mother is a burden to me.   |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 3.                              | I feel longing if I am away from my mother for too long.                         |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 4.                              | My ideas regarding racial equality are similar to my mother's.                   |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 5.                              | My mother's wishes have influenced my selection of friends.                      |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 6.                              | I feel like I am constantly at war with my mother.                               |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 7.                              | I blame my mother for many of the problems I have.                               |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 8.                              | I wish I could trust my mother more.   |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 9.                              | My attitudes about obscenity are similar to my mother's.                         |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 10.                             | When I am in difficulty I usually call upon my mother to help me out of trouble. |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 11.                             | My mother is the most important person in the world to me.                       |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 12.                             | I have to be careful not to hurt my mother's feelings.                           |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 13.                             | I wish that my mother lived nearer so I could visit her more frequently.         |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 14.                             | My opinions regarding the role of women are similar to my mother's.              |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 15.                             | I often ask my mother to assist me in solving my personal problems.              |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 16.                             | I sometimes feel like I'm being punished by my mother.                           |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 17.                             | Being away from my mother makes me feel lonely.                                  |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 18.                             | I wish my mother wasn't so overprotective.                                       |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 19.                             | My opinions regarding the role of men are similar to my mother's.                |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 20.                             | I wouldn't make a major purchase without my mother's approval.                   |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 21.                             | I wish my mother wouldn't try to manipulate me.                                  |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 22.                             | I wish my mother wouldn't try to make fun of me.                                 |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 23.                             | I sometimes call home just to hear my mother's voice.                            |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 24.                             | My religious beliefs are similar to my mother's.                                 |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 25.                             | My mother's wishes have influenced my choice of major at school.                 |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 26.                             | I feel that I have obligations to my mother that I wish I didn't have.           |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 27.                             | My mother expects too much from me.  |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 28.                             | I wish I could stop lying to my mother.  |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 29.                             | My beliefs regarding how to raise children are similar to my mother's.           |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 30.                             | My mother helps me to make my budget.  |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 31.                             | While I am home on a vacation I like to spend most of my time with my mother.    |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 32.                             | I often wish my mother would treat me more like an adult.                        |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 33.                             | After being with my mother for a vacation I find it difficult to leave her.      |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 34.                             | My values regarding honesty are similar to my mother's.                          |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 35.                             | I generally consult with my mother when I make plans for an out of town weekend. |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 36.                             | I am often angry at my mother.   |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 37.                             | I like to hug and kiss my mother.  |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 38.                             | I hate it when my mother makes suggestions about what I do.                      |                                |                         |
| ___                           | 39.                             | My attitudes about solitude are similar to my mother's.                          |                                |                         |

- \_\_\_ 40. I consult with my mother when deciding about part-time employment.
- \_\_\_ 41. I decide what to do according to whether my mother will approve of it.
- \_\_\_ 42. Even when my mother has a good idea I refuse to listen to it because she made it.
- \_\_\_ 43. When I do poorly in school I feel I'm letting my mother down.
- \_\_\_ 44. My attitudes regarding environmental protection are similar to my mother's.
- \_\_\_ 45. I ask my mother what to do when I get into a tough situation.
- \_\_\_ 46. I wish my mother wouldn't try to get me to take sides with her.
- \_\_\_ 47. My mother is my best friend.
- \_\_\_ 48. I argue with my mother over little things.
- \_\_\_ 49. My beliefs about how the world began are similar to my mother's.
- \_\_\_ 50. I do what my mother decides on most questions that come up.
- \_\_\_ 51. I seem to be closer to my mother than most people my age.
- \_\_\_ 52. My mother is sometimes a source of embarrassment to me.
- \_\_\_ 53. Sometimes I think I am too dependent on my mother.
- \_\_\_ 54. My beliefs about what happens to people when they die are similar to my mother's.
- \_\_\_ 55. I ask for my mother's advice when I am planning my vacation time.
- \_\_\_ 56. I am sometimes ashamed of my mother.
- \_\_\_ 57. I care too much about my mother's reactions.
- \_\_\_ 58. I get angry when my mother criticizes me.
- \_\_\_ 59. My attitudes regarding sex are similar to my mother's.
- \_\_\_ 60. I like to have my mother help me pick out the clothing I buy for special occasions.
- \_\_\_ 61. I sometimes feel like an extension of my mother.
- \_\_\_ 62. When I don't write my mother often enough I feel guilty.
- \_\_\_ 63. I feel uncomfortable keeping things from my mother.
- \_\_\_ 64. My attitudes regarding national defense are similar to my mother's.
- \_\_\_ 65. I call my mother whenever anything goes wrong.
- \_\_\_ 66. I often have to make decisions for my mother.
- \_\_\_ 67. I'm not sure I could make it in life without my mother.
- \_\_\_ 68. I sometimes resent it when my mother tells me what to do.
- \_\_\_ 69. My attitudes regarding mentally ill people are similar to my mother's.
- \_\_\_ 70. I like to show my friends pictures of my father.
- \_\_\_ 71. Sometimes my father is a burden to me.
- \_\_\_ 72. I feel longing if I am away from my father for too long.
- \_\_\_ 73. My ideas regarding racial equality are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 74. My father's wishes have influenced my selection of friends.
- \_\_\_ 75. I feel like I am constantly at war with my father.
- \_\_\_ 76. I blame my father for many of the problems I have.
- \_\_\_ 77. I wish I could trust my father more.
- \_\_\_ 78. My attitudes about obscenity are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 79. When I am in difficulty I usually call upon my father to help me out of trouble.
- \_\_\_ 80. My father is the most important person in the world to me.
- \_\_\_ 81. I have to be careful not to hurt my father's feelings.
- \_\_\_ 82. I wish that my father lived nearer so I could visit him more frequently.
- \_\_\_ 83. My opinions regarding the role of women are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 84. I often ask my father to assist me in solving my personal problems.
- \_\_\_ 85. I sometimes feel like I'm being punished by my father.
- \_\_\_ 86. Being away from my father makes me feel lonely.
- \_\_\_ 87. I wish my father wasn't so overprotective.
- \_\_\_ 88. My opinions regarding the role of men are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 89. I wouldn't make a major purchase without my father's approval.
- \_\_\_ 90. I wish my father wouldn't try to manipulate me.

- \_\_\_ 91. I wish my father wouldn't try to make fun of me.
- \_\_\_ 92. I sometimes call home just to hear my father's voice.
- \_\_\_ 93. My religious beliefs are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 94. My father's wishes have influenced my choice of major at school.
- \_\_\_ 95. I feel that I have obligations to my father that I wish I didn't have.
- \_\_\_ 96. My father expects too much from me.
- \_\_\_ 97. I wish I could stop lying to my father.
- \_\_\_ 98. My beliefs regarding how to raise children are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 99. My father helps me to make my budget.
- \_\_\_ 100. While I am home on a vacation I like to spend most of my time with my father.
- \_\_\_ 101. I often wish my father would treat me more like an adult.
- \_\_\_ 102. After being with my father for a vacation I find it difficult to leave him.
- \_\_\_ 103. My values regarding honesty are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 104. I generally consult with my father when I make plans for an out of town weekend.
- \_\_\_ 105. I am often angry at my father.
- \_\_\_ 106. I like to hug and kiss my father.
- \_\_\_ 107. I hate it when my father makes suggestions about what I do.
- \_\_\_ 108. My attitudes about solitude are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 109. I consult with my father when deciding about part-time employment.
- \_\_\_ 110. I decide what to do according to whether my father will approve of it.
- \_\_\_ 111. Even when my father has a good idea I refuse to listen to it because he made it.
- \_\_\_ 112. When I do poorly in school I feel I'm letting my father down.
- \_\_\_ 113. My attitudes regarding environmental protection are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 114. I ask my father what to do when I get into a tough situation.
- \_\_\_ 115. I wish my father wouldn't try to get me to take sides with him.
- \_\_\_ 116. My father is my best friend.
- \_\_\_ 117. I argue with my father over little things.
- \_\_\_ 118. My beliefs about how the world began are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 119. I do what my father decides on most questions that come up.
- \_\_\_ 120. I seem to be closer to my father than most people my age.
- \_\_\_ 121. My father is sometimes a source of embarrassment to me.
- \_\_\_ 122. Sometimes I think I am too dependent on my father.
- \_\_\_ 123. My beliefs about what happens to people when they die are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 124. I ask for my father's advice when I am planning my vacation time.
- \_\_\_ 125. I am sometimes ashamed of my father.
- \_\_\_ 126. I care too much about my father's reactions.
- \_\_\_ 127. I get angry when my father criticizes me.
- \_\_\_ 128. My attitudes regarding sex are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 129. I like to have my father help me pick out the clothing I buy for special occasions.
- \_\_\_ 130. I sometimes feel like an extension of my father.
- \_\_\_ 131. When I don't write my father often enough I feel guilty.
- \_\_\_ 132. I feel uncomfortable keeping things from my father.
- \_\_\_ 133. My attitudes regarding national defense are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 134. I call my father whenever anything goes wrong.
- \_\_\_ 135. I often have to make decisions for my father.
- \_\_\_ 136. I'm not sure I could make it in life without my father.
- \_\_\_ 137. I sometimes resent it when my father tells me what to do.
- \_\_\_ 138. My attitudes regarding mentally ill people are similar to my father's.

Appendix D  
Procedural Letter to Instructors

Dear Professor

Enclosed please find Cover Letter, Consent, and Information Forms for distribution in your class(es). Thank you for agreeing to participate in the screening portion of my research study by reading the Cover Letter and allowing class time for your students to complete the remainder of the forms.

In order for the research to be presented in a uniform manner to all the participants, please follow the procedure outlined below.

1. As you distribute the forms, introduce the study by stating:

I am distributing Cover Letter, Consent and Information Forms for a doctoral research study which is being conducted by Mary Oppenhuizen. Your participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect your grade in this class. After I collect the forms, I will place them in an envelope and seal it. If you have completed this form in another class, please do not complete another. I have been requested to read the Cover Letter to you.

2. Please read Cover Letter to the class.

3. After Reading the Cover Letter, please announce:

I will allow a few minutes for those willing to participate in the study to sign the Consent and complete the Information Form located on the second page.

4. After approximately three minutes, collect the forms.

5. Please count and record the number of students present on the day of distribution. \_\_\_\_\_ students were present.

6. Please place the collected forms and this sheet in the envelope, seal it, and return it to your department office. I will collect it on (date indicated).

If you have any questions, you may contact me at 530-8771 (home) or 895-3266 (work). Your assistance and cooperation are very much appreciated.

Mary Oppenhuizen, M.A.

## Appendix E

Letter of Approval From Human Subjects Institutional  
Review Board of Western Michigan University

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board



Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008-3899

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## WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

---

Date: March 19, 1992

To: Mary Oppenhuizen

From: Mary Anne Bunda, Chair *Mary Anne Bunda*

Re: HSIRB Project Number 92-03-06

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research protocol, "How Gender and Psychological Separation From Parents Interact with Depression in the Young Adult Experience of Parental Marital Separation and Divorce" has been approved after full review by the HSIRB. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the approval application.

You must seek reapproval for any change in this design. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

xc: Trembley, CECF

Approval Termination:

March 19, 1993



## Appendix F

Letter of Approval From Human Research Review  
Committee of Grand Valley State University



1 CAMPUS DRIVE • ALLENDALE MICHIGAN 49401-9403 • 616/895-6611

March 18, 1992

Mary Oppenhuizen  
3437 Tomahawk  
Grandville, MI 49418

Dear Mary:

The Human Research Review Committee of Grand Valley State University is charged to examine proposals with respect to protection of human subjects. The Committee has considered your proposal, *"How Gender and Psychological Separation from Parents Interact with Depression in the Young Adult Experience of Parental Marital Separation and Divorce"*, and is satisfied that you have complied with the intent of the regulations published in the Federal Register 46 (16): 8386-8392, January 26, 1981.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'P. Huizenga'.

Paul Huizenga, Chair  
Human Research Review Committee

cc: Western Michigan University  
fax #387-3747

*Research & Development - 201 LMH - Allendale, MI 49401 - (616) 895-2281*

## Appendix G

### Request for Permission to Reproduce Sample Copy of Multiscore Depression Inventory

College of Education  
Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology



Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008-5195  
616 387-5100

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## WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

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Ms. Susan Weinberg  
Western Psychological Services  
12031 Wilshire Boulevard  
Los Angeles, California 90025

August 24, 1992

Dear Ms. Weinberg,

This letter is to request permission to reproduce the sample copy of the Multiscore Depression Inventory Hand-Scored Answer Sheet, David J. Berndt, Western Psychological Services, 1986, for inclusion in a doctoral dissertation in Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. The dissertation advisor is Edward L. Trembley, D.Ed. The title of the dissertation is: How Gender and Psychological Separation from Parents Interact with Depression in the Young Adult Experience of Parental Marital Separation and Divorce.

I would like to include the sample copy of the Multiscore Depression Inventory Hand-Scored Answer Sheet in the Appendix section of the dissertation.

Please notify me as soon as possible regarding permission to reproduce the inventory. Please send a return letter to my address printed below.

Thank you.

*Mary Oppenhuizen, M.A.*

Mary Oppenhuizen, M.A.  
3437 Tomahawk Dr.  
Grandville, MI 49418

## Appendix H

### Letter of Permission to Reproduce Sample Copy of Multiscore Depression Inventory

September 2, 1992

Mary Oppenhuizen, M.A.  
3437 Tomahawk Drive  
Grandville, Michigan 49418

Dear Ms. Oppenhuizen:

Thank you for your letter of August 24, in which you request authorization to reprint copyrighted WPS material for inclusion in the appendix of your dissertation through Western Michigan University, "How Gender and Psychological Separation from Parents Interact with Depression in the Young Adult Experience of Parental Marital Separation and Divorce."

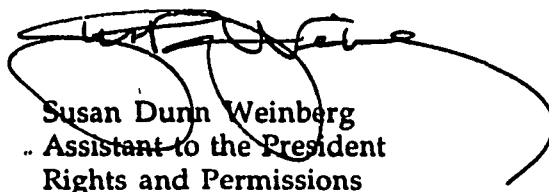
Western Psychological Services hereby authorizes you to reproduce a sample Hand-Scored Answer Sheet (W-213B) for the *Multiscore Depression Inventory*, for the above-described purpose only, provided that each reprint bear the following required notice in its entirety:

"Copyright © 1986 by Western Psychological Services. Reprinted for display purposes by permission of the publisher, Western Psychological Services, 12031 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90025."

Please note that this authorization does not extend to the creation of microfilmed copies; due to the public availability of microfilmed copies, WPS policy is not to authorize reproduction in this manner. While we regret any inconvenience this may cause, we hope you appreciate our concern with ethical considerations.

Your interest in our materials is appreciated, as is your consideration for copyrights. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely yours,



Susan Dunn Weinberg  
Assistant to the President  
Rights and Permissions

SDW:se

## Appendix I

### Request to Reproduce Copy of Psychological Separation Inventory

College of Education  
Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology



Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008-5195  
616 387-5100

---

## WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

---

Dr. Jeffrey A. Hoffman  
703 N. Wood Terrace  
Silver Springs, MD 20902

August 24, 1992

Dear Dr. Hoffman,

This letter is to request permission to reproduce the enclosed copy of the Psychological Separation Inventory for inclusion in a doctoral dissertation in Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. The dissertation advisor is Edward L. Trembley, D.Ed. The title of the dissertation is: How Gender and Psychological Separation from Parents Interact with Depression in the Young Adult Experience of Parental Marital Separation and Divorce.

I would like to include the Psychological Separation Inventory in the Appendix section of the dissertation.

Please notify me as soon as possible regarding permission to reproduce the inventory. Please send a return letter to my address printed below.

Thank you.

*Mary Oppenhuizen, M.A.*

Mary Oppenhuizen, M.A.  
3437 Tomahawk Dr.  
Grandville, MI 49418



## Appendix J

### Letter of Approval to Reproduce Copy of Psychological Separation Inventory

9/2/92<sup>99</sup>

Jeffrey A. Hoffman, Ph.D.  
703 Northwood Terrace  
Silver Spring, MD 20902

Dear Colleague:

I am sending you a copy of the Psychological Separation Inventory and the scoring key as requested. Below is a table of means and standard deviations for the various scales. Please do not combine the scales for a total psychological separation score since the various scales are not at positively correlated. Please feel free to reproduce the PSI and to use it for research, clinical or teaching purposes. I am sorry that I do not have reprints available to send to you. I hope that you will not have any difficulty making a copy from the journal of Counseling Psychology. If so, please write back and I will make a copy to send to you. For additional research, see: Hoffman, J. and Weiss, B., Family Dynamics and Presenting Problems in College Students, Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1987, V. 34, No. 2.

Thank you and good luck.

Sincerely,

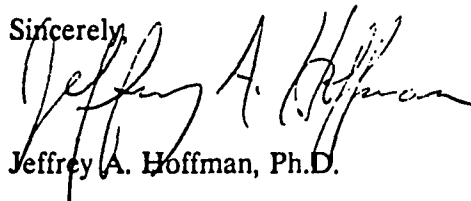
  
Jeffrey A. Hoffman, Ph.D.

Table. Psychological Separation Inventory Means and Standard Deviations For a Random Sample of White College Students From Intact Families (N=190).

Scales	Males (N=83)				Females (N=107)			
	Father		Mother		Father		Mother	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
FI	34	11	36	10	35	11	31	10
EI	47	13	49	12	44	14	42	13
CI	83	16	84	13	82	14	80	15
AI	27	12	29	10	27	11	25	11

Note. FI = functional independence;  
EI = emotional independence;  
CI = conflictual independence;  
AI = attitudinal independence.

Taken from: Hoffman, Jeffrey A. "Presenting Problems and Family Dynamics of College Students", Dissertation, University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, 1985.

# **PSYCHOLOGICAL SEPARATION INVENTORY**

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**Instructions:** The following list of statements describes different aspects of students' relationships with both their mother and father. Imagine a scale ranging from 1 to 5 that tells how well each statement applies to you. In the space next to the statement, please enter a number from "1" (Not at all true of me) to "5" (Very true of me). If the statement does not apply enter "1". Please be completely honest. Your answer are entirely confidential and will be useful only if they accurately describe you.

Not at all true of me 1	A little bit true of me 2	Moderately true of me 3	Quite a bit true of me 4	Very true of me 5
___ 1.				
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___ 47.				

- \_\_\_ 48. I argue with my mother over little things.
- \_\_\_ 49. My beliefs about how the world began are similar to my mother's.
- \_\_\_ 50. I do what my mother decides on most questions that come up.
- \_\_\_ 51. I seem to be closer to my mother than most people my age.
- \_\_\_ 52. My mother is sometimes a source of embarrassment to me.
- \_\_\_ 53. Sometimes I think I am too dependent on my mother.
- \_\_\_ 54. My beliefs about what happens to people when they die are similar to my mother's.
- \_\_\_ 55. I ask for my mother's advice when I am planning my vacation time.
- \_\_\_ 56. I am sometimes ashamed of my mother.
- \_\_\_ 57. I care too much about my mother's reactions.
- \_\_\_ 58. I get angry when my mother criticizes me.
- \_\_\_ 59. My attitudes regarding sex are similar to my mother's.
- \_\_\_ 60. I like to have my mother help me pick out the clothing I buy for special occasions.
- \_\_\_ 61. I sometimes feel like an extension of my mother.
- \_\_\_ 62. When I don't write my mother often enough I feel guilty.
- \_\_\_ 63. I feel uncomfortable keeping things from my mother.
- \_\_\_ 64. My attitudes regarding national defense are similar to my mother's.
- \_\_\_ 65. I call my mother whenever anything goes wrong.
- \_\_\_ 66. I often have to make decisions for my mother.
- \_\_\_ 67. I'm not sure I could make it in life without my mother.
- \_\_\_ 68. I sometimes resent it when my mother tells me what to do.
- \_\_\_ 69. My attitudes regarding mentally ill people are similar to my mother's.
- \_\_\_ 70. I like to show my friends pictures of my father.
- \_\_\_ 71. Sometimes my father is a burden to me.
- \_\_\_ 72. I feel longing if I am away from my father for too long.
- \_\_\_ 73. My ideas regarding racial equality are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 74. My father's wishes have influenced my selection of friends.
- \_\_\_ 75. I feel like I am constantly at war with my father.
- \_\_\_ 76. I blame my father for many of the problems I have.
- \_\_\_ 77. I wish I could trust my father more.
- \_\_\_ 78. My attitudes about obscenity are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 79. When I am in difficulty I usually call upon my father to help me out of trouble.
- \_\_\_ 80. My father is the most important person in the world to me.
- \_\_\_ 81. I have to be careful not to hurt my father's feelings.
- \_\_\_ 82. I wish that my father lived nearer so I could visit him more frequently.
- \_\_\_ 83. My opinions regarding the role of women are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 84. I often ask my father to assist me in solving my personal problems.
- \_\_\_ 85. I sometimes feel like I'm being punished by my father.
- \_\_\_ 86. Being away from my father makes me feel lonely.
- \_\_\_ 87. I wish my father wasn't so overprotective.
- \_\_\_ 88. My opinions regarding the role of men are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 89. I wouldn't make a major purchase without my father's approval.
- \_\_\_ 90. I wish my father wouldn't try to manipulate me.
- \_\_\_ 91. I wish my father wouldn't try to make fun of me.
- \_\_\_ 92. I sometimes call home just to hear my father's voice.
- \_\_\_ 93. My religious beliefs are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 94. My father's wishes have influenced my choice of major at school.
- \_\_\_ 95. I feel that I have obligations to my father that I wish I didn't have.
- \_\_\_ 96. My father expects too much from me.
- \_\_\_ 97. I wish I could stop lying to my father.
- \_\_\_ 98. My beliefs regarding how to raise children are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 99. My father helps me to make my budget.
- \_\_\_ 100. While I am home on a vacation I like to spend most of my time with my father.
- \_\_\_ 101. I often wish that my father would treat me more like an adult.
- \_\_\_ 102. After being with my father for a vacation I find it difficult to leave him.
- \_\_\_ 103. My values regarding honesty are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 104. I generally consult with my father when I make plans for an out of town weekend.
- \_\_\_ 105. I am often angry at my father.
- \_\_\_ 106. I like to hug and kiss my father.
- \_\_\_ 107. I hate it when my father makes suggestions about what I do.
- \_\_\_ 108. My attitudes about solitude are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 109. I consult with my father when deciding about part-time employment.
- \_\_\_ 110. I decide what to do according to whether my father will approve of it.

- \_\_\_ 111. Even when my father has a good idea I refuse to listen to it because he made it.
- \_\_\_ 112. When I do poorly in school I feel I'm letting my father down.
- \_\_\_ 113. My attitudes regarding environmental protection are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 114. I ask my father what to do when I get into a tough situation.
- \_\_\_ 115. I wish my father wouldn't try to get me to take sides with him.
- \_\_\_ 116. My father is my best friend.
- \_\_\_ 117. I argue with my father over little things.
- \_\_\_ 118. My beliefs about how the world began are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 119. I do what my father decides on most questions that come up.
- \_\_\_ 120. I seem to be closer to my father than most people my age.
- \_\_\_ 121. My father is sometimes a source of embarrassment to me.
- \_\_\_ 122. Sometimes I think I am too dependent on my father.
- \_\_\_ 123. My beliefs about what happens to people when they die are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 124. I ask for my father's advice when I am planning my vacation time.
- \_\_\_ 125. I am sometimes ashamed of my father.
- \_\_\_ 126. I care too much about my father's reactions.
- \_\_\_ 127. I get angry when my father criticizes me.
- \_\_\_ 128. My attitudes regarding sex are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 129. I like to have my father help me pick out the clothing I buy for special occasions.
- \_\_\_ 130. I sometimes feel like an extension of my father.
- \_\_\_ 131. When I don't write my father often enough I feel guilty.
- \_\_\_ 132. I feel uncomfortable keeping things from my father.
- \_\_\_ 133. My attitudes regarding national defense are similar to my father's.
- \_\_\_ 134. I call my father whenever anything goes wrong.
- \_\_\_ 135. I often have to make decisions for my father.
- \_\_\_ 136. I'm not sure I could make it in life without my father.
- \_\_\_ 137. I sometimes resent it when my father tells me what to do.
- \_\_\_ 138. My attitudes regarding mentally ill people are similar to my father's.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL SEPARATION INVENTORY SCORING KEY

**F=FUNCTIONAL INDEPENDENCE**  
**C=CONFLICTUAL INDEPENDENCE**

**E=EMOTIONAL INDEPENDENCE**  
**A=ATTITUDINAL INDEPENDENCE**

**MOTHER SCALES=1-69**  
**FATHER SCALES=70-138**

1. E	24. A	47. E	70. E	93. A	116. E
2. C	25. F	48. C	71. C	94. F	117. C
3. E	26. C	49. A	72. E	95. C	118. A
4. A	27. C	50. F	73. A	96. C	119. F
5. F	28. C	51. E	74. F	97. C	120. E
6. C	29. A	52. C	75. C	98. A	121. C
7. C	30. F	53. E	76. C	99. F	122. E
8. C	31. E	54. A	77. C	100. E	123. A
9. A	32. C	55. F	78. A	101. C	124. F
10. F	33. E	56. C	79. F	102. E	125. C
11. E	34. A	57. E	80. E	103. A	126. E
12. C	35. F	58. C	81. C	104. F	127. C
13. E	36. C	59. A	82. E	105. C	128. A
14. A	37. E	60. F	83. A	106. E	129. F
15. F	38. C	61. E	84. F	107. C	130. E
16. C	39. A	62. C	85. C	108. A	131. C
17. E	40. F	63. C	86. E	109. F	132. C
18. C	41. E	64. A	87. C	110. E	133. A
19. A	42. C	65. F	88. A	111. C	134. F
20. F	43. E	66. C	89. F	112. E	135. C
21. C	44. A	67. E	90. C	113. A	136. E
22. C	45. F	68. C	91. C	114. F	137. C
23. E	46. C	69. A	92. E	115. C	138. A

To score, add up the total for each scale and subtract from total possible for that scale; scoring mother and father scales separately.

Total scores possible: F=65 E=85 C=125 A=70

K O B A A S S O C I A T E S, I N C.



December 4, 1992

Mary Oppenhuizen  
3437 Tomahawk  
Grandville, Michigan 49418

Dear Ms. Oppenhuizen:

Per your request, you have my permission to use the Psychological Separation Inventory in your dissertation.

Sincerely,

  
Jeffrey A. Hoffman, Ph.D.

1156 FIFTEENTH STREET, N.W. • SUITE 200 • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005 • 202 328-5700 • TELEX No. 430138 • FAX No. 202 659-3027

K O B A A S S O C I A T E S, I N C.



December 4, 1992

Dr. Jeffrey A. Hoffman  
Executive Director  
Koba Center for Drug Treatment and Research  
1156 15th Street, N.W., Suite 200  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear UMI Dissertation Services:

Per the request of Mary Oppenhuizen, you have my permission to provide copies of the Psychological Separation Inventory on demand to those who request it.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Hoffman

1156 FIFTEENTH STREET, N.W. • SUITE 200 • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005 • 202 328-5700 • TELEX No. 430138 • FAX No. 202 659-3027

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