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**PARENTAL DIVORCE AT ADOLESCENCE:  
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Behavioural Sciences  
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This thesis represents my original research and is my own work except where acknowledged. No part of this work has been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Rosemary Dunlop

To Ian, Sarah and Michael,  
with my love.



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## ABSTRACT

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The main thesis presented here is that adolescent adjustment is associated with processes within the family rather than with divorced or non-divorced family structure and that understanding these processes can aid prediction.

A framework was adopted integrating aspects of developmental, symbolic interactionist and family systems theories, and relevant findings from previous research were examined.

The study was longitudinal, examining correlates of adjustment at divorce and three years later and identifying factors predicting adjustment across this time interval. Thirty-seven families were recruited from the Sydney and Parramatta registries of the Australian Family Court and a comparison group of 41 non-divorcing families was drawn from New South Wales state high schools. Control of time since final separation and age of adolescents, first contact close to the point of divorce and follow-up three years later provided the time-frame. Standard tests were used to measure adolescent self-image, depression and anxiety, and their view of the relationship with each parent along dimensions of care and overprotection. A parent-derived scale appraising adolescent functioning provided an independent measure of adjustment. Parents' adjustment and marital satisfaction were also measured. Adolescent response to the divorce was examined by scales based on interview items. Separate home interviews were carried out with adolescents and, where possible, both parents.

The results indicated that adolescent adjustment in both divorced and intact families at first interview was associated with perceived levels of family happiness, degree of family conflict, and nature of parent-child relationships. Evidence of links between parental psychopathology and child adjustment was found. Among those from divorcing families adjustment was related to the quality of the relationship, but not the gender, of the custodial parent. Decrease

in family conflict following separation was associated with better school and general adjustment. Those with close ties with their fathers experienced a greater degree of emotional distress but this was not associated with poorer general adjustment. Few age or sex effects were found, and there were no significant differences in adjustment between those from intact and divorcing homes.

Three years later very similar results emerged. Current family happiness, conflict and parent-child relationships were all related to adjustment. No significant group differences were found on a measure of readiness for intimacy, although interview responses showed that those from divorced families were rather more sexually active. Among this group, custody was no longer significant and adjustment was associated with age rather than divorce response, with higher adjustment among older adolescents. Conflict change and acceptance of the divorce were linked to some aspects of self-image. Feelings about the divorce were still related to the adolescents' view of the father - those who felt close to him expressed sadness, but this emotional response was not related to self-image scores.

Predictive analyses showed that self-image scores were remarkably constant over three years, and that parental care and overprotection at Time 1 were significantly correlated with scores at Time 2. Self-image at Time 1 (with Time 2 mother care) explained 40% of the variance in Time 2 scores.

Four case-histories were presented showing how the results expressed themselves in individual lives. The findings were then related to previous research and theory, and recommendations were offered for counselling, legal procedures and future research.

The results support the thesis that adolescent adjustment is associated with family processes rather than divorced or intact family structure, and that predictions based on this knowledge can be made.



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The project grew out of a proposal submitted to the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 1981 for a longitudinal interview study of the effects of parental divorce at adolescence. The Institute was then in process of setting up its *Australian Family Reformation* project with a national sample of adults, and had called for research submissions for smaller scale studies on children and adolescents to provide more detailed and qualitative information. I applied for a grant to carry out this research, with my supervisor, Associate-Professor Burns. The proposal was accepted and the Institute has funded the study generously over two phases of interviews in 1982 and 1985. The report on the first round of interviews, titled '*Don't feel the world is caving in*': *Adolescents in divorcing families* was published as a monograph by the Institute in May, 1988. I want to express my thanks to the Council of the Institute, and to Dr Don Edgar, its Director, for his continued support and interest. Our thanks also go to Macquarie University for supplementary assistance to the project.

A particular strength of this research is the court-derived sample, providing a broad, non-clinical, subject pool. I would like to thank Justice Elizabeth Evatt, then Chief Judge of the Family Court, for her support for this research, and the Registrars of the Sydney and Parramatta branches of the Court for their co-operation in sending letters to clients on our behalf. A very warm thanks goes to Sophy Bordow, Research Psychologist of the Family Court, for handling the sampling process (which had to be

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## CHAPTER 1

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Overview

##### Research Aims

The aim of this study is to examine the responses of a court-derived sample of adolescents to their parents' divorce at the time of the divorce and three years later, and to compare their levels of psychological adjustment at both times with that of a control group of adolescents from non-divorcing families. The main goal is to specify variables associated with adjustment at both time intervals, and to identify factors at Time 1 which predict adjustment at Time 2.

Only two other studies known to the author examine adolescent adjustment close to the time of divorce and follow the subjects up over time. The first is an influential Californian study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) which, however, has a small sample in this age range, is clinical in method and has no control group. The second is a prospective Kansas study, using an adjective checklist in class with high-school students (Parish and Wigle, 1985). This compares adolescents experiencing divorce during a three-year interval, with those from non-divorced and previously divorced families. Both of these studies are descriptive rather than predictive in nature.

The present research seeks to extend this work by following up over three years a court-derived sample of divorcing families and an equivalent comparison group of intact families, employing both standard measures and interviews with parents and adolescents. The study focuses on the adolescents' experience of family separation and it is their view that provides the main source of data; information independently derived from parents at Time 1 is also used.

##### Thesis

The argument presented in this study is that adolescent adjustment is associated with processes within the family, rather than divorced or non-divorcing family structure, and that

an understanding of these processes can provide a basis for predicting longer term adjustment.

It is argued that one-point-in-time analyses frequently tend by their methodological nature to mislead by categorising families according to structure (divorced or intact<sup>1</sup>) and by attributing child outcomes to this structure per se. There is an assumption that children of divorce are, by definition, psychologically disadvantaged. By emphasising group differences such a position downplays the variability within both intact and divorced families, and has therefore generally failed to explore the interactive processes involving parents and children which contribute to coping strength in both divorced and intact families.

In addition, a cross-sectional analysis presents a static view - a snap-shot of structure and outcome. In reality families - whether intact or separated - are in constant process of change as children and adults grow older and adjust to new stages in the life cycle. Divorce itself is a process of change, involving crisis-resolution and adaptation over time. To throw fresh light on how adolescents experience divorce and allow identification of those at risk, a research design is needed that can encompass change and adaptation while also charting continuities.

A related concern is the distinction between immediate reaction and longer-term adjustment. Where parental separation is unanticipated and bitterly opposed, strong feelings of distress may be expected. These may be an appropriate and time-limited mourning response, or they may foreshadow long-term developmental disruption. It is argued that previous studies have not clearly distinguished between immediate and long-term aspects of adolescent response.

The present study follows earlier work in treating self-concept as a major outcome variable. But rather than using self-concept simply as a useful measure of adjustment (as

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<sup>1</sup> While "structure" is used by some writers to denote patterns of power and/or alliance within the family, the term is used here to indicate intact or divorced parental status. "Intact" denotes families where both parents are present, and "divorced" indicates those in process of divorcing at the first interview. "Separated" is sometimes used as an alternative for the latter group. Terms such as "single-parent" or "broken home" are avoided where possible as they imply that only one parent is psychologically available following divorce.

The term "family process" is used to cover intra-familial transactions and includes the adolescent's perception of the way in which each parent relates to the subject, and the perceived level of family happiness and conflict. Parental measures of psychological health are also seen as a relevant aspect of family processes.

studies in this field have frequently done), it espouses a theoretical position in which current self-concept is seen as bi-directionally linked to the quality of family processes as they occur over time. (A model setting this out in the context of time elapsed since divorce is presented in Chapter 3, Figure 3.1.)

There is considerable theoretical and empirical evidence linking the development of children's self-concept and social competence to the nature of parent-child relationships (Baumrind, 1971; Coopersmith, 1967; Mead, 1934; Rogers, 1951) and some recognition that these interactions are bi-directional (Bell, 1979; Parke, 1977). But there has been little attempt to link these insights directly to self-concept in divorce studies where this is used as a measure of child adjustment. In the relatively few studies which have included family processes as predictor or mediating variables, the long-term effects of parent-child relationships on self-concept have rarely been examined. In addition, the nature of parent-child relationships at adolescence, when young people have special and sometimes contradictory needs for emotional security and autonomy, has received little attention in the divorce literature.

It is assumed in the present study that the experience of divorce will differ across families. Divorce may come as a painful shock to an adolescent or as a welcome release from years of family stress. It follows that the adolescent's view of family processes is an important determinant of his or her response to divorce. The adolescent's perceptions of the current family climate - whether it is happy or conflictual, and whether there has been a change for better or worse since separation - are treated as variables of fundamental importance.

It is also assumed that appraisal by the adolescent of the nature of his or her relationship with each parent will vary greatly across families. Issues of parental control and emotional separation from the family come to the fore at this stage and are handled differently. Parent-child interactions may either facilitate or hinder differentiation and identity formation. This is so in both intact and divorcing families. When the family structure itself is in process of radical alteration as a result of divorce, normal development may be jeopardised by rejection or by symbiotic dependence between a parent and child. It is argued that the adolescent who can count on a relationship with at least one parent that is

close but not over-dependent, will be significantly better able to cope with divorce than one who lacks this security.

The main outcome variable is a measure of self-concept, the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977a), which examines eleven aspects of adolescent adjustment and development and provides a total score regarded by the authors as a global measure of adjustment and well-being. An index of neuroticism, the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire, with scales examining depression and anxiety is included (Scheier and Cattell, 1961). An independent measure of the adolescents' current functioning at Time 1 was obtained from parents (the Parents' Appraisal Scale). At Time 2, a scale measuring readiness for intimacy, from the Erikson Psychosocial Inventory Scale (Rosenthal, Gurney and Moore, 1981) was also used. These and other measures are described in full in Chapter 3.

The family processes examined in both family groups include adolescents' experience of current family happiness and conflict and their perception of the way each parent interacts with them. Parent reports of marital satisfaction and measures of parents' psychological health are also included. In the divorced family group, factors associated with adolescents' response to the divorce are examined. These include, relations with the custodial parent, the availability and quality of social support for the adolescent, and the adolescent's emotional and cognitive response to the divorce.

Age is included in all analyses, and sex differences are examined. Demographic and other background variables including socio-economic status, ethnicity, family composition, religion, family health and others are also included.

At the three-year follow-up adolescent variables are re-examined. Cross-sectional analyses are carried out at each time interval and a predictive analysis examines associations between Time 1 measures and adjustment at Time 2.

A framework has been adopted that permits examination of family processes at adolescence over time and that encompasses both developmental and family change.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Publications based on parts of this research include a monograph, Dunlop and Burns (1988), *'Don't feel the world is caving in': Adolescents in divorcing families*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Other publications include, Dunlop (1982), and Dunlop and Burns (1983, 1984, 1986).

## **Theoretical Background**

A theoretical position, encompassing the temporal and dynamic nature of family processes, has informed the design and implementation of this thesis. Three main theoretical sources are drawn upon.

Developmental theory provides the first source, since the present focus is on the effects of divorce at adolescence. Adolescence is conceptualised rather differently according to one's choice of theory, but there is basic agreement that this stage of development involves multiple adjustments to change and that key issues are those of individuation and differentiation from the family of origin. Studying youngsters experiencing a major life-event at adolescence provides an opportunity to examine the nature of adolescence itself. In this thesis we ask how divorce at adolescence interacts with developmental change, and what this tells us about the needs and capacities of adolescents.

Self-image is chosen as the chief outcome variable. At the inter-personal level a symbolic interactionist perspective draws attention to processes through which the self is constructed by interaction with significant others. From this perspective a child's perception of parental attitudes towards him- or herself has profound implications for self-image and self-esteem. These issues form a central part of the present research.

A family systems approach views the family as a system in process of transformation. It draws attention to processes of fission and fusion normally present in family systems, allowing divorce to be seen not as a discrete event, but as a transition involving both continuity and change. Both this and the previous perspective acknowledge the interface of family and social context, and each draws attention to the central importance of cognitive appraisal or construal in mediating response.

Each position is briefly discussed below, with reference to its relevance to the present topic.

### Developmental Theory

Surprisingly few writers have drawn on developmental theory as a means of understanding children's divorce response. The influential work of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) is the major exception, and other clinicians, drawing on case histories, have also

presented developmental analyses, usually with a psychodynamic orientation (these studies are discussed in Chapter 2). Some studies of pre-school and primary children, such as that of Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1979) have used developmental measures, but more commonly age is simply included as an obligatory covariate in samples including both younger children and adolescents. A few studies have examined cognitive aspects of development and have found divorce adjustment to be related to level of interpersonal reasoning (Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky, 1981; McGurk and Glachan, 1987; Neal, 1983).

If developmental responses are to be understood it is necessary to avoid confounding age with time since separation. Adolescents whose parents parted when they were young children are long past the initial crisis of separation and are therefore not directly comparable with those experiencing divorce at adolescence, but a pervasive problem in divorce research is the dearth of studies examining children and adolescents close to the time of their parents' divorce. Only four adolescent studies could be found which satisfied this criterion, three of which had no control group of non-divorcing families. As noted above, only two examined progress over time. Failure to provide a comparison group to enable separation of divorce-specific from developmental response is a major flaw considering the multiple adaptations that are part of normal adolescence. The present study accordingly controls for age at separation and includes a comparison group.

Theories of development vary in their underlying assumptions, and these may colour the expectations of researchers. Developmental theories of adolescence include the psychoanalytic approach in which it is viewed as a period of crisis; a position designated a "multidimensional change" approach in which it is regarded as a normative transition; and cognitive developmental theory which posits qualitative changes in levels of thinking and complexity of social cognition at adolescence. The major relevant concepts are briefly reviewed below.

Psychoanalytic Theory. Freud's psychosexual account of child development does not include adolescence, but later psychoanalytic writers such as Anna Freud (1958) and Blos (1962) have filled in this omission. Psychoanalytic theories of adolescence, therefore, incorporate Freudian metapsychology and inferences about the developmental antecedents of adolescence. It is viewed as a period of psychosexual struggle, initiated by the emergence of



powerful sexual and aggressive drives at puberty after the relative peace of latency. Unresolved Oedipal problems are expected to re-emerge, and must be worked through in order to allow the adolescent to develop a well-defined sexual identity and to differentiate from his or her parents. Anna Freud believes that it is essential to go through a major psychological upheaval in order to attain a well-differentiated ego, and that young people who fail to do so are at developmental risk.

This theory has been prominent among the few developmental studies of adolescents in divorce, especially among clinicians. Predominant among these is the Californian work of Judith Wallerstein and Joan Kelly (Kelly, 1981; Kelly and Wallerstein, 1977; Wallerstein, 1983, 1985; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1974, 1976, 1979, 1980a,b), whose longitudinal study is discussed below. When applied to divorce it invokes strong theoretical assumptions about the critical nature of adolescent functioning, and the impact of overt parental sexuality at this developmental stage. Divorce is seen as posing a threat to personality organisation at a time when the adolescent is already burdened by intrinsic instability. While these assumptions may be open to question, this model rightly draws attention to the importance of the quality of parent-child relationships, and the adolescent's need to differentiate from the family.

Multidimensional Change Theory. The thinking of theorists adopting a multidimensional change view of adolescence, such as Daniel Offer and his colleagues (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1981a), supports American empirical findings that have not found evidence of the widespread personality disorganisation or turmoil among large populations of adolescents that would have been predicted from psychoanalytic theory (Douvan and Adelson, 1966; Hathaway and Monaschesi, 1963). Offer (1969) examined the psychological health of the "modal" adolescent and found little to support the traditional view. In a later study (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1981c) it was shown that health professionals held a far more negative view of "normal" adolescent self-image than emerged from adolescents themselves. Offer and his team have accumulated much information in studies with large samples over a period of 25 years. Their research does not support the view that the adolescent must inevitably experience turbulence and rebellion in order to separate emotionally from parents. Cross-cultural studies in a number of countries including Australia using the self-image measure devised by Offer and his colleagues have supported

his view of normal adolescence (1981a, p 107-108) although fairly high levels of anxiety do seem to be common during this period of rapid developmental change.

Concluding that a "crisis" view of adolescence has resulted from the clinical nature of the work from which it is derived, Offer et al developed a theory of normal adolescence based on the premise that the adolescent is confronted by the need to adapt to multiple changes. These include coming to terms with physical and emotional aspects of puberty, managing social relationships including educational and vocational challenges, handling emerging sexuality, negotiating developmentally appropriate ties with parents, and coping with the demands of the external world. It is assumed that development does not necessarily proceed evenly on all fronts. Disparity between areas of development may cause strain, but there are many pathways to overall adjustment. A minority of adolescents, proportionate to those in the adult population, may be expected to show psychopathological symptoms, but there is strong continuity in development.

An English study by Rutter, Graham, Chadwick and Yule (1976) provides some support for Offer's position. These writers examined levels of psychological adjustment among a large Isle of Wight sample of 14-15 year olds including a subsample previously diagnosed as having a psychiatric disorder at age ten. Approximately 20 per cent of the previously undiagnosed group report "often feeling miserable or depressed" and other symptoms of stress are also evident among the sample, but only a small minority can be regarded as clinically depressed. Rates of psychiatric disorder are higher than during middle childhood, but just under half these cases had been diagnosed four to five years earlier. These authors conclude that adolescence is stressful, but that many psychiatric problems have their origin in earlier childhood rather than manifesting themselves for the first time at adolescence.

From the perspective of this theory, divorce at adolescence presents a series of new changes. The adolescent has to find ways of coping with further adjustments, but some of the changes already taking place may diminish the magnitude of this upheaval. Increasing independence, orientation towards a wider social horizon and greater personal competence provides the adolescent with strengths that a younger child does not possess.

Cognitive Developmental Theory. The psychoanalytic and multidimensional change positions emphasise personality development. Cognitive developmentalists (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969; Inhelder and Piaget, 1958; Kohlberg, 1969; Selman, 1980) draw attention to changes in cognitive performance. They argue that qualitative changes occur in sequential stages, enabling the child to think in more complex ways and to increase his or her range of understanding. Adolescent thinking moves beyond concrete operations to a capacity for abstract thought involving hypothetico-deductive and propositional reasoning. This ability is also manifest in adolescent moral and social thinking, although the levels of thinking may not be synchronised across all areas of functioning (Selman, Jaquette and Lavin, 1977).

Longfellow (1979) has pointed out that divorce research has tended to neglect cognitive development. She argues that a child's adjustment to parental separation is linked to his or her capacity to understand, and shows how Selman's work on social perspective taking and interpersonal reasoning can be used to re-interpret the observed responses to divorce of children of different ages. By early adolescence most children have reached Selman's "third person" level, with the capacity to adopt the perspective of a third person, simultaneously reflecting on one's own and another person's perspectives as they relate to each other. Interpersonal relationships are understood in terms of reciprocal attitudes and actions. With the acquisition of formal operations the adolescent can enter Selman's level of "qualitative systems". At this stage he or she is able to coordinate multiple levels of perspectives. The capacity for abstract thought enables the adolescent to view personalities as complex systems of values, traits and feelings, and relationships are seen as existing on qualitatively distinct levels.

Increasing levels of complexity in social cognition, in Longfellow's view, explain age-specific responses to divorce. Very young children who are still egocentric in their thinking cannot understand a parent's departure and often blame themselves. By adolescence interpersonal reasoning has reached a level which allows them to distance themselves from their parents and to understand that adult needs may not be congruent with their own, but that parental separation does not necessarily imply rejection of themselves. At the same time, preoccupation with principles can lead to harsh moral judgements.

Kohlberg and Gilligan (1971) describe a progression from conventional morality (conformity to rules because they are sanctioned by authority) in preadolescence, to postconventional moral reasoning (when rules are seen as linked to principles which are subject to justification, rejection or reformulation). They distinguish between levels within these stages and see development as sequential with the highest level attained dependent on individual and cultural circumstances.

These formulations provide a framework in which to understand the need of adolescents for sensitive explanation of parental separation. Sudden de-idealisation of parents may be disturbing, and young people may need time to accommodate their thinking to a more complex level in order to understand their parents' decision.

Summary. Assumptions about the nature of adolescent development may influence the way in which the impact of parental separation at this stage is conceptualised. If adolescence is regarded as an intrinsically unstable period, researchers may focus on vulnerability and potentially negative outcomes. If, however, it is seen as a period of normative change, the intersection of divorce with the changes that normally occur may be analysed with a more open-minded expectation of outcome. Cognitive developmental theory draws attention to the adolescent's increasing cognitive strengths, and consequent capacity to understand complex family relationships.

In the present study a multidimensional change position has been adopted, and the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire, which was designed to examine multiple aspects of adolescent adjustment, was chosen as the main outcome measure. This position is augmented by insights from cognitive developmental theory.

### The Self - a Symbolic Interactionist Position

Although self-concept has been used fairly commonly in divorce research as a measure of child adjustment, little attempt has been made to articulate theoretical links between self-image and family processes in this literature. Symbolic interactionism provides a means of bridging the individual and inter-personal aspects of these processes.

G.H. Mead (1934) viewed the self as the product of reflection by the experiencing "I" on the "me" as perceived by significant others. He explores the social construction of the

phenomenal self in terms of perceived meanings and active role-participation. The child's perception of the way he or she is viewed by mother, father and other key figures is seen as the means by which the "me" emerges, and this process continues through interaction with significant others throughout adulthood. Extension of this process to the wider social sphere also occurs through awareness of self in relation to the "generalised" other.

Other writers, outside the symbolic interactionist perspective also draw attention to factors influencing the development of the child's sense of self. Piaget's cognitive approach stresses the active construction of self through interaction with the physical, social and linguistic worlds. Rogers (1951), taking a clinical perspective, places central importance on the phenomenal self, emphasising the potentially damaging or facilitative role of parental rejection or acceptance. He argues that disconfirmation of a child's experience by denial or rejection can result in distortion of self-image and consequent pathology. Sullivan (1953) also gives strong emphasis to the need for self-esteem and the part played by parental disapproval in structuring the self-system and causing parts of it to be denied to consciousness. Laing (1969) makes strong claims for the effects of multi-generational family processes on the capacity of the young to develop a well-integrated sense of self.

All these approaches emphasise the role played by the immediate family in the development of the child's self-concept. A problem with those theories derived from clinical experience, however, is their tendency to adopt a unidirectional parent-to-child causal link, with the corollary that poor child outcomes are the direct result of poor parenting practices. It is often the inadequate mother who is implicitly to blame. A symbolic interactionist position provides for a more interactive family framework, including the father as well as the mother, and also allowing for child-to-parent influences. The child's active appraisal is emphasised as a vital cognitive element.

A sense of self, then, may be seen as emerging through interaction between the individual and those with whom he or she has close ties. Where the reflected image of the self is valued, the child has the opportunity to develop a healthy self-image, feeling prized, trusted and accepted. Disconfirmation or rejection may be damaging to a child's self-image, creating insecurity and mistrust. The child also brings intrinsic characteristics to these interactions, and it is the person's appraisal of self as viewed by others that crucially affects

self-image. It is also recognised that because every individual plays many roles there are multiple ways in which the self can find expression, so a simple positive-negative dimension does not adequately summarise the many facets of self-image, nor convey the possibility of situational and temporal variation.

The readiness of symbolic interactionist theory to accommodate both continuity and change makes it particularly useful in the present study, where developmental change at adolescence involves shifts in relationships with parents and increasing influence from the social world beyond the family. For the divorcing families the nature of continuity or change in relationships with significant others is a central issue.

Because of the highly abstract nature of the concept of self, there are, however, considerable difficulties in testing self theory. Since the self is by definition experienced phenomenologically, self-report provides the only direct access. Opinions vary as to whether self-reports are to be trusted (Wylie, 1974), but there is increasing interest in personal accounts (Harré, 1978) and recognition of the value of direct communication in gaining insight into personal experience. Sophisticated techniques of measurement design have overcome many of the earlier problems of poor internal reliability and susceptibility to social desirability. Measures tapping multiple aspects of functioning can be checked against a variety of tests of criterion validity.

There is empirical evidence to support the theoretical link between the nature of parent-child relations and self-concept. Coopersmith (1967), for example, reports higher self-concept scores among boys whose mothers are accepting, provide clear guide-lines, are democratic in their parenting, are not overly protective and themselves have high self-concepts. Other research confirms that high self-esteem is associated with indicators of child adjustment such as achievement and popularity (Coopersmith, 1959; Piers and Harris, 1964); and that psychiatrically disturbed, delinquent, physically ill and intellectually handicapped adolescents have poorer scores than their peers (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1981a; Piers and Harris, 1964).

Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1981a), whose self-image questionnaire for adolescents is adopted as the main outcome measure for this study, present a well-argued defence of the use of self-reports. They claim that choice of method in science is subject to the purpose of

the investigator. If the purpose is to investigate the subject's view of him- or herself, the appropriate instrument is one that provides the closest approximation to this subjective view that an outsider can achieve. They see the adolescent as "a perceiver and experienter of his own self", and view his "me" as a construct that can legitimately be used by others in a "scientific hypothetico-deductive system".

In the present thesis the focus is on the adolescents' view of family relationships and their experience of their parents' divorce. It is argued that use of interview material and self-report measures is logically consistent, appropriate to the purpose of the research and consonant with the theoretical framework adopted. Additional information from parents at Time 1 provides a subsidiary source of independent data.

A symbolic interactionist position views the subject's appraisal of a situation as essential data. This approach is a valuable corrective to theoretical approaches that dissect behaviour without recourse to the meaning it has for the subject. There is evidence from varying sources that the way a person construes or interprets an event will play a central part in his or her response to it. Considerable clinical and empirical work now supports Kelly's personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), which was predicated on the premise that the way in which events are anticipated will channel a person's psychological processes. So also parents' beliefs about child development and the causes of child disturbance have been shown to contribute to child outcomes (see Goodnow, 1988). Recognition of the need to take account of the subject's appraisal of events is also a feature of more recent theories of coping with stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Taylor, 1983). On this basis it can be argued that in a divorce an adolescent's response will be strongly influenced by the way in which he or she construes this event and perceives processes in the pre- and post-divorce family.

It is important, however, to acknowledge that events underlie construals. Thus it is assumed that the adolescent's perception of family processes arises from actual experience within the family, as interpreted by him or her.

### A Family Systems Approach

While the symbolic interactionist position described above focuses on inter-personal processes and the construction of the self, systems theory addresses the family unit as whole and the reciprocal interactions of family members as an inter-related system. Derived from Bertalanffy's general systems theory (1968) it represents the family as a homeostatic system based on information flow and open to input from without. Often presented somewhat mechanistically by analogy with computer flow-charts, this theory has features which can express very well the organismic processes of growth and change in living systems and the recursive effects of human understanding.

Systems theory has been applied to the family by different writers with somewhat differing emphases, but as Walsh (1982) has pointed out there is general agreement about its essential features. Of importance for the present purposes is that the family is seen normatively as "a transactional system operating over time", (page 25). Those features that are of particular value in understanding family change will be summarised below.

Ecological Context. Bateson (1972) was one of the first to draw attention to the ecological context in which open systems operate and with which they interact. Australian families are living in a time of rapid social and economic change. The current cohort of adolescents has grown up at a time when divorce rates have been steadily rising. The stigma associated with divorce in past generations has greatly diminished although social disapproval is still high in some regional or religious groups. There is also greater awareness - among children from both intact and separated families - of the reality of family separation. Influences entering the family system include mixed messages about traditional and changing attitudes to sexuality, divorce, and women's aspirations. Economic factors are a strong external force.

Family Processes. Systems theory holds that a change in any one member of a family affects every other member and, because the sum is greater than its parts, affects the family as a whole. Causality is regarded as circular rather than linear. This concept is especially useful for incorporating developmental change into systemic theory. An adolescent's increasing sexual and social needs, for example, will interact with parents' personal concerns, creating cycles of interaction affecting all members of the family. Circular



causality is a useful concept in understanding the reciprocating processes by which marital relationships break down, and the reverberating effects on other family members.

Homeostasis and Morphogenesis. A central concept of family systems theory is that feedback mechanisms operate to maintain family stability (homeostasis) and to allow for change (morphogenesis). Information, looping back through the system, serves either to correct the tendency to change or to facilitate transformation. Failure to adapt to change leads to maladaptive configurations perpetuating a system that has become anachronistic.

Ahrons (1980, 1981) and Ahrons and Perlmutter (1982) argue that family systems theory is especially appropriate for understanding families in divorce. It allows divorce to be seen as a process rather than a discrete event, and it focuses on transformation rather than disintegration of the family. While certain aspects of the system are declining (e.g. the spousal subsystem), there is also continuity in that the mother-child and/or father-child subsystems can continue to operate and indeed to grow. This approach provides a tool for analysing the complex relationships after divorce in what Ahrons calls the “binuclear family”. Both Ahrons and Goldsmith (1982) point out that a family systems approach fits well with empirical studies which have found that continued high quality involvement of both parents with children following divorce promotes child adjustment (Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1979, Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b). Dysfunctional parent-child interactions following divorce may, of course, also develop.

According to systems theory a family's equilibrium may be either adaptive or maladaptive. Pathology in a family member may function to maintain homeostasis when a family is unwilling or unable to accommodate to change. Bowen (1978) moved from a psychoanalytic to a systems approach after observing that patients were often locked into hostile, overbinding relationships with mothers in families where spousal relationships were poor. Bowen's analysis of the family focused on emotional attachments between family members and the balance achieved between autonomy and fusion. He argued that in a functional marital relationship parents are able to enjoy emotional intimacy without loss of autonomy and can encourage autonomy in their children. In less functional families a child may become locked into a triangular relationship with both parents, or may become the focus of inappropriate anxiety and attention. Beal (1979), using Bowen's model, examined the

operation of "child focus" among 40 divorcing families undergoing therapy. He found that severe child focus involves a pattern of highly anxious and intense emotional investment in a child, associated with inclusion of the child in parental conflict and extreme difficulty in discussing the divorce or preparing him or her for the separation. Children in this position become highly anxious and involved in their parents' concerns, with ensuing damage to their own process of differentiation.

Beal found that a second group of families, characterised by "mild" child focus are far better able to handle the process of family restructuring. Although adult relationships are highly stressed, parents are able to exclude children from involvement in their own conflict, separating their spousal from their parenting roles. Children are not enlisted as allies, and open communication between parents and children provides explanation and reassurance. Beal's analysis allows us to focus both on pathological processes and also on the adaptive strengths that family members have. Parents who maintain warm but not over-binding relationships with their children can provide stability during the phase of family transition, especially if communication is good, and they are able to separate their own painful relationship from their interactions with their children.

Boundaries. Themes of autonomy and dependence are taken up by other family systems theorists in a somewhat different way. Minuchin's (1974) structural model stresses the importance of clear delineation of boundaries - implicit rules defining the family and the functioning of its subsystems. To Minuchin the family is an open system in transformation, developing over time and adapting in ways that allow both continuity and the growth of family members. The family structure is "the invisible set of functional demands that organises the ways in which family members interact" (op. cit. page 51). The functions of the family are carried out by subsystems, with primary authority and responsibility invested in the parents. Several subsystems may co-exist, and the boundaries may be drawn differently according to the domain in question. According to Minuchin, a functional family is one in which the hierarchy is clear and the membership and functions of the subsystems are well defined. This is necessary so that transactions between family members can occur in an orderly way, and the family can adapt to change without disorganisation.

Family boundaries may be diffuse or rigid. In "enmeshed" families, internal boundaries are unclear and the functions of family members coalesce: autonomy is hard to achieve because of the togetherness of the family. At the other extreme "disengaged" family members operate as individuals: the family lacks coherence and may be prone to disintegration under stress. Minuchin regards extremes as potentially dysfunctional, while the middle range encompasses a variety of functional styles. In similar vein, Olson and McCubbin (1983) have developed a circumplex model based on dimensions of cohesion and adaptability, encompassing 16 types of family functioning. Walsh (1982) points out that such classifications may have limited practical value, since family style is subject to developmental change. What is of interest, however, is the widespread theoretical recognition of the need to balance autonomy and dependence.

Minuchin regards a hierarchical structure and clearly defined parental control system as desirable for satisfactory family functioning. This position is shared by Haley (1973) and Lidz (1976). The latter writer incorporates psychoanalytic elements into his model, regarding clear generational boundaries as necessary to avoid Oedipal entanglements and to provide for same-sex parental identification.

When parents separate, the maintenance of a strong parental dyad becomes problematic. The family is faced with a radical transformation involving redefinition of its hierarchy and its old transactional rules. Ahrons (1980) argues that much of the stress experienced in divorce is due to the absence of clear boundaries and the need to recreate them. Using a court-derived sample of 45 couples, she found (1981) that about half continue to interact over child-rearing a year after divorce. Successful co-parenting is achieved by separated couples who are able to interact in a cooperative and supportive way. A parental subsystem, then, can continue even though the marital relationship has ceased. But what happens when there is no chance of co-operation, or when a distraught or lonely parent needs support? Goldsmith (1982) points out that a child or adolescent may step into a parenting or even a spousal role forming a new subsystem with a parent. She argues that although such roles are usually deemed to be dysfunctional they may have positive results, increasing a child's self-esteem and sense of responsibility. However they have the potential to be damaging if they become too rigid and interfere with normal developmental needs.

Beal (1979) also comments that adolescents quite often take on a “reversed caretaking” role, which is adaptive for the family for a short period, but not if it is prolonged. Minuchin (1974) argues that the clarity of subsystem boundaries is of greater importance than their composition, so that a functional subsystem with clearly defined areas of responsibility and authority may include a grandparent or “parental” child.

When parents part, family boundaries must necessarily undergo radical change as part of the process of transformation of the system. At adolescence parent-child relationships are already in process of change. Negotiation of appropriate boundaries following divorce has the potential for positive or negative outcome. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) although not systems theorists, stress the dangers of blurring generational boundaries following divorce, especially at adolescence. Weiss (1979b) on the other hand, argues that sharing of responsibilities between adolescents and custodial parent may be matched by a less hierarchical but fully functional family structure, as adolescents acquire increasing autonomy and a more equal relationship with their parents.

In the present study systems theory concepts are used as a means of linking adolescent development and the familial context.

### **Towards an Integrated Framework**

The approaches described above can provide a broad, integrated framework for understanding ongoing family processes when parents separate at adolescence. In Chapter 3 a model is presented illustrating the operation of these processes over time. This model can be read at three levels incorporating the theoretical framework presented here.

Developmental theories, despite their differing emphases, depict adolescence as a time of change when increasing physical, emotional and cognitive maturity paves the way for separation from the family of origin and inclusion in the adult world. A recurring theme is the need for emotional differentiation from parents in order to develop a stable sense of identity. Parent-child relationships may be placed under strain as each adjusts to these developmental needs. The multiple changes taking place are stressful but evidence suggests that for the majority of adolescents the transition is reasonably trouble-free. Divorce at adolescence may interact with development in a variety of ways. It may be an added

stressor, disrupting progress, or it may hasten processes of development and differentiation already in train. Cognitive gains at adolescence may help understanding of the complex interpersonal relationships involved in divorce.

All major developmental theories draw attention to the importance of parent-child relationships, but the symbolic interactionist position places greater emphasis on their interactive nature and on the part played by the child's perceptions as an active participant. It draws attention to the phenomenological world of the adolescent experiencing family change.

While systems theory concentrates on the family as a unit, it is not inimical to a symbolic interactionist approach, as Burr, Leigh, Day and Constantine (1979) point out. The notion of circular causality promotes an interactive rather than linear view of causality, consonant with an interactionist stance.

Family systems theory provides a link between individual developmental change and family restructuring. The theme of autonomy versus enmeshment is a familiar one in systemic theory, and becomes especially salient when adolescent and family needs are seen together. The collapse of the family into total disengagement may leave the adolescent with no stable structure, while there is also the danger of enmeshment in unresolved parental conflict or emotional entanglement with a parent without a partner. In the present study the main emphasis is on the adolescents' perception of family processes; systemic theory allows this to be understood within the context of family transformation.

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## CHAPTER 2

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### CHILDREN OF DIVORCE LITERATURE

"All children would prefer to have parents who live together and get on well, but that doesn't mean that you can't be happy if your parents split." Tom, aged 16.

Few people would question that a happy intact family provides children with a good start in life, and that divorce has the potential to create insecurity, and sadness. But intact families are not always as ideal as stereotypes would have us believe, and marriage breakdown is not a discrete event. Divorce is the outcome of processes that may have been taking place for years, and the subsequent adjustment of family members is also dependent on continuing processes of adaptation. Tom's case-history demonstrates a successful outcome of these processes, but the outcome is not so favourable for all adolescents.

In the present review I show that the early divorce literature used family structure (separated/divorced versus intact) as an independent variable, ignoring the variability of family processes, and I argue that although in more recent times multi-method designs and multivariate analyses have demonstrated the importance of mediating variables, divorced versus intact structure has still remained the primary independent variable. Thus the underlying question still asks "Does divorce harm children?", whereas a far more pressing question is "What family processes harm, protect or enhance children in both intact and separated families?" The importance of this point is underlined by the current call for a return to "the traditional family" by influential political and moral leaders, at a time when the high rate of previously concealed family violence and child abuse is emerging, and when research consistently points to a strong relationship between high levels of conflict (whether parents are together or not) and poor child outcomes. It is therefore increasingly urgent that the distinction between family structure and the quality of family processes be clearly understood.

This review examines studies that come to different conclusions about the nature of the effect of divorce on adolescents and children, and argues that sampling and methodological artefacts make it hard to compare across studies. Despite this problem, the conclusion

reached is that the majority of children are not psychologically harmed, but a minority is at risk. Some, especially those whose family situation has improved, are better off. Sampling differences present a serious problem but across different samples certain family processes associated with child outcomes can be identified. Major mediating variables to emerge are the degree of family conflict experienced and the nature of parent-child relationships.

Gaps in the divorce literature include lack of specificity about the nature of "good" parent-child relationships and failure to attempt to explain the linkage between family processes and child outcomes as noted above. A serious omission is the paucity of longitudinal research examining the nature of divorce adjustment and its correlates over time. A need exists for studies identifying predictors of long-term outcome that could help to target appropriate intervention to adolescents and children who are at risk.

A major gap is a dearth of studies of adolescent response at the time of parental divorce. The majority of studies of adolescents are of those whose parents separated at varying times prior to their reaching adolescence. Six studies were found of subjects who had experienced divorce at adolescence. Of these, two had subjects in the late adolescence/early adult age-range. In addition, one of these did not examine current divorce response exclusively since subjects were college students, aged 17 to 23, who had experienced parental divorce at age 12 or older (Farber, Primavera and Felner, 1983), and the second study by these authors (1985) concerned college students currently experiencing parental divorce, but deriving data indirectly from impressions of directors of college counselling services. The other four studies - all American - examined adolescent responses close to divorce. Details of these studies are summarised in Table 2.1., page 74.

It is hard to make generalisations from these studies because of their differences in scope, in sample and in method. They are therefore discussed below in conjunction with other studies of adolescents in divorce classified according to method and research aim. and are briefly compared in a concluding section.

### Organisation of the Literature Review

There is a large and diverse literature on the impact of divorce on children, but relatively few studies deal specifically with adolescents. Many studies include children of

mixed ages (including some adolescents ), and until recently few have specified how long parents had been apart. For these reasons this review nets in studies which lie outside the parameters of the present research. These include studies of adolescents whose parents had parted when they were younger, and those examining the responses of pre-adolescents and younger children where these augment the adolescent literature. As comparatively little divorce research has been carried out in Australia, considerable reliance must be placed on overseas research, but it is important to be aware of socio-cultural differences that may modify generalisation to Australian conditions.

Following the introductory section, the review is divided into two main groups: firstly; studies emanating from clinicians, mainly using clinical evaluations and a case-history approach; and secondly, studies using survey and measurement techniques and quantitative analyses. Each section is further sub-divided. The clinical section examines studies of the relative proportion of divorced families in clinic samples, and patterns of presenting problems according to family structure, before going on to discuss adolescent studies with a psychodynamic orientation, with special attention to the longitudinal work of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b). The survey and measurement section looks first at studies which compare groups according to divorced and intact family structure on measures of adjustment such as self concept, other self-report tests, anti-social behaviour, educational outcomes and heterosexual adjustment. It moves on to consider studies that examine mediating factors including family conflict, parent-child relationships, sex and age-related issues, economic and social factors and factors intrinsic to the child. Where studies overlap these two organisational categories their findings are noted where relevant to the discussion. Longitudinal studies are briefly reviewed, and the few studies specifically examining adolescents at divorce are brought together and compared. A brief methodological discussion precedes a final summary of the main substantive conclusions drawn from the review.



## Historical Background

### Concern About the Rising Tide of Divorce

As in other Western countries, divorce rates have risen dramatically in Australia since the early years of this century. According to Day (1976), the proportion of marriages ending in divorce in 1901, based on figures from the State of New South Wales (the only records in existence), was 4 per cent. By the early 1980's, the Institute of Family Studies, (McDonald, 1983), was estimating that if current trends continued 40 per cent of Australian marriages would end in divorce. The divorce curve rose slowly but steadily during the first decades, took a sharp rise following World War II, and increased markedly during the 1960's and 70's. During this time there was increasing community desire for more humane termination of failed marriages than that provided by the then current Matrimonial Causes Act. The Family Law Act (1975) removed matrimonial fault as the basis of divorce and replaced it with the concept of irretrievable break-down of marriage, (see Evatt, 1979). Following its implementation the crude divorce rate (per 1000 mean population) rose sharply to a peak of 4.5 in 1976, two and a half times the rate of the previous year. The rate remained inflated as people unable to divorce under the old Act, or wishing to avoid the acrimony of the previous process, now sought dissolution. The shortened waiting time (from five years to one) also increased the numbers eligible to apply. By 1982 the crude rate had dropped back to 2.9; since then the decline has continued, dropping to 2.4 by 1987 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1988b). Present estimates of the percentage of marriages likely to end in divorce vary according to marriage cohort from 25 per cent for those marrying in the mid-sixties, to 30-33 per cent for the mid-seventies (McDonald, 1986).

The enormous rise in divorce over the previous decades has involved over half a million Australian children since 1976. In 1982, the first year of the present study, 53,000 children under the age of 18 experienced their parents' divorce (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1988b). It is not surprising that in this and other countries much concern has been expressed about the impact of this major social change on the lives and well-being of these youngsters. The immediate question asked was, does divorce cause psychological damage to children?

### Survey and Measurement Studies of the Effects of Father- Absence , pre-1971

Since mothers are more likely to have custody than fathers, early divorce studies conceptualised separation in terms of "father-absence". Influenced by identification and sex-role theory, these studies predicted that boys and (less frequently) girls raised without a father present would be more likely to be delinquent, lacking in appropriate sex-role behaviour, emotionally disturbed, or lower in scholastic performance than those from intact families. Biller (1970) and Herzog and Sudia (1971) carried out reviews of this largely American research. The bulk of this literature deals with pre-adolescents; when adolescents are included time since parental separation is rarely specified.

Biller's extensive review concentrates on sex-role deficits attributed to lack of identification with the absent father. While he amasses a large number of studies which conclude that father-absent children - especially boys - differ from those with both parents present, he acknowledges that many of the studies have major methodological flaws. These include failure to specify sex and age of child, the length, cause and age of onset of father absence, or the degree of availability of the "absent" father. When control groups are included they are often poorly matched, with crucial variables such as socio-economic status left uncontrolled. An even more telling criticism is that the dependent variables from which deficits are inferred are often highly questionable. For example, choice of a small candy bar at once rather than a larger one a week later by West Indian eight and nine year-olds (Mischel, 1961, cited by Biller, 1970), is reported as evidence of poor impulse control in father-absent boys, but might rather be interpreted as adaptive reality-oriented behaviour in a social group where economic deprivation and father-absence co-exist. Confused definitions of masculinity also abound, as where failure to display aggression in doll-play by pre-school and primary boys is taken as evidence of poor sex-role development by Sears, Pintler and Sears (1946), Sears (1951) and Bach (1946), but aggression among father-absent working-class adolescents (Miller, 1958) is seen as over-compensation against a feminine role-model (studies cited by Biller, 1970). Thus the dice seem to be loaded against the child of divorce whichever way the results turn out. Apart from this obvious bias, sex-role identity is naively conceptualised in these early studies. They pre-date the work of Bem (1976) and

others who have shown the limitation of bi-polar sex-typing, and the greater flexibility of those with personality attributes supposedly characteristic of each of the sexes.

The review by Herzog and Sudia (1971), is more searching than that of Biller. After a careful analysis of the methods and results of 58 studies of the effects of father-absence on child outcomes they conclude that no broad generalisations can legitimately be made from this body of research. In the three categories of juvenile delinquency, school achievement and masculine identity they find no clear evidence that fatherless boys are at greater risk, after elimination of sampling and other biases found in the studies purporting to find deficits. They conclude that factors present before and after separation are at least as important as the separation itself, which should be seen as mediated by "a complex of interacting variables" (page 62). They draw the conclusion that family functioning is more crucial to a child's development than the number of parents in the home, and that the family climate is determined not only by the interactions of its members, but also by social and economic factors.

These reviews paved the way for increased rigour in research design, and recognition that divorce adjustment is multiply determined. Much progress has been made in identifying factors that mediate response, but methodological problems continue to beset this untidy real-life area where the truly unbiased sample is virtually impossible to obtain. Diversity in populations and research approaches, however, has yielded a variety of perspectives. Taking this body of research together, clear patterns have begun to emerge. In the next section clinical and case-history approaches will be reviewed first and then survey and measurement studies.

### **Divorce Adjustment: Studies with a Clinical Approach**

Studies categorised as "clinical" in this review are those using case-histories as primary data and depending on clinical judgements rather than psychological measures to determine adolescent and child outcomes. Studies using survey and measurement methods and quantitative analyses are discussed in a later section.

Among the former is a body of work reflecting the strong influence of psychodynamic theory in clinical child psychology (Westman, 1972; Sorosky, 1977; Wallerstein and Kelly.

1980b; Kalter and Rembar, 1981; Schwartzberg, 1980). In these reports judgements about adjustment are commonly made with psychoanalytic criteria in mind and emphasis is placed on the possible ill-effects of disruption to parent-child relations at stages regarded as developmentally vulnerable. Since much of this research is based on clinic populations, the results should be generalised to a wider population with caution, but because the studies throw light on the least coping families they indicate areas of vulnerability that cannot be ignored.

Research by clinicians using alternative research methods has been included in the following section where relevant.

#### Relative Proportion of Divorced Families in Clinic Samples

Several questions emerge from the clinical literature. The first concerns whether or not children of divorce are disproportionately represented among clinic samples. In an early study Despert (1963) analysed her clinical records and found proportionately fewer children from divorced families than would be predicted from the divorce rate in the population. She concludes that "emotional divorce" in intact families is more damaging than divorce itself. Westman, Cline, Swift and Kramer (1970) also report a smaller ratio than expected. McDermott (1970) and Kalter (1977), however find divorced families to be disproportionately highly represented. Schoettle and Cantwell (1980) analysed 2,351 cases consecutively presenting over 11 months at the Neuropsychiatric Institute at the University of Los Angeles. They find that the ratio (4.4 : 5.0) does not exceed that of the marriage/divorce ratio for Los Angeles County.

Because of problems in equating differing measures of child disturbance with rates of marriage dissolution in different geographical areas, the question of the relative incidence of psychopathology must be left open. It is clear, however that a substantial number of adolescents and children from divorced families are referred for treatment. This may in part be due to anxiety on the part of parents, or negative attributions of children's adjustment by parents who are themselves depressed (see Rickard, Forehand, Wells, Griest and McMahon, 1981), but it does appear that some children may be especially vulnerable to the events of divorce. The questions that remain are whether distinctive patterns of

maladjustment are associated with divorce, and what has been reported by clinicians using a psychodynamic approach.

### Do Presenting Problems Differ Between Divorced and Non-divorced Groups?

Schoettle and Cantwell (1980) examined the presenting problems of 1,043 children of divorce, and 1,172 from intact families. They found a significantly higher rate of behaviour, social, family conflict, learning, truancy and affect problems among the divorced group, whereas the children from intact families had more medical, delayed development and school phobia difficulties. After a six-week evaluation process, it was found that many of the presenting signs and symptoms were no longer significant. The divorced group remained higher than the children from intact families only in Family Conflict (and Disturbed Affect among the preschool group). For children of divorce the diagnosis of Transient Situational Disturbance was significantly more common (but among girls only), whereas more of the intact family children were diagnosed as mentally retarded. These results suggest that difficulties uniquely associated with divorce may be of a transitory nature, rather than indicating deep-seated problems. They highlight the possibility of drawing invalid inferences from studies that do not include a control group, and in which all disturbance is therefore automatically attributed to divorce. Other than Schoettle and Cantwell, few clinical studies provide control groups allowing comparison between divorced and non-divorced subjects.

Another important finding of Schoettle and Cantwell is that black families were far more highly represented among the divorced group ( $p = .0001$ ), as were low-income families ( $p = .001$ ). Where social disadvantage and marital instability coexist, as is the case in many large urban communities, it is hard to disentangle these effects. The importance of investigating these variables becomes obvious, as is the need to control for socio-economic status when generalising from one cultural or geographical group to another.

### Studies with a Psychodynamic Orientation

Much work on divorce by clinicians is psychodynamic in orientation and uses psychoanalytic developmental concepts. According to psychoanalytic theory, the effects of divorce interact with the age of the child. Divorce when a child is between three and six is

likely to be particularly damaging because of interference to the resolution of the Oedipal crisis (McDermott,1970; Westman, Cline, Swift and Kramer,1970; Kalter and Rembar,1981). During latency the absence of a same-sex role model who serves as the object of identification is likely to complicate adjustment, especially for boys with mothers who are sole parents.

Adolescence is typified by psychoanalytic theory as a period of major personality reorganisation, characterised by mood swings and normative psychological turbulence (Blos,1962; A. Freud,1958). In addition, the specific task of adolescence is seen as de-cathexis of primary objects (parents and family of origin) in preparation for adult heterosexual pairing. Divorce is seen as an added stressor at this particularly vulnerable time. Disintegration of the family may threaten normal differentiation, either by destroying the secure base from which the adolescent ventures out into the world or by creating over-binding relationships between a needy parent and a child.

Much clinical reporting is predicated on these psychodynamic assumptions. Sorosky (1977), integrating a literature review with his own impressions as a child psychiatrist in clinical practice, draws attention to the variability of adolescent responses, but goes on to detail a largely negative picture of the impact of divorce at adolescence. He summarises these as fear of abandonment, rejection or loss of love, interference with the resolution of typical adolescent conflicts, and an intense fear of personal marital failure. Schwartzberg (1980) reports his clinical experience with 30 adolescents first seen in adolescence, although their parents had separated up to 17 years earlier (mean = 4.7 years since separation). Three groups are identified: adolescents with psychopathology present before their parents parted, those with temporary regression, and those making premature attempts at mastery. In the first group divorce appears to have exacerbated pre-existing problems. In the second, the pre-divorce family had been relatively stable and there had been little or no preparation for the separation. The shock was severe for these adolescents, but their development was only temporarily disrupted. The third group react with what Schwartzberg describes as "premature mastery of drives and separation-individuation" (page 385). This includes sexual acting-out (especially among girls), running away from home, anti-social behaviour (among boys) and drug-abuse. Unfortunately the author includes little information about the pre-

and post-divorce family situation and does not indicate the numbers in each group, although elsewhere he notes that nine were hospitalised and that these cases are associated with pre-existing psychopathology and divorce before adolescence. Adolescents who cope best possess personal ego strength and also enjoy a good relationship with the custodial parent. This is usually a mother who has herself adapted well, and is a warm and caring parent.

The reports of Sorosky and Schwartzberg detail the painful responses of their adolescent patients, among whom anger, sadness, guilt, and a sense of abandonment are common. These divorce responses are seen as interacting with two psychodynamic processes, the adolescent's need to master aggressive and sexual conflicts, and the challenges of dependency-independency. A major problem with these studies is the absence of comparison groups of patients whose parents are together, or of divorced subjects who have not sought clinical help. To what extent can the negative behaviours listed by Schwartzberg be attributed to divorce, and how much is due to pre-existing personal or family pathology among clinic patients? How common are "premature attempts at mastery" among adolescents whether or not their parents are together?

#### The California Children of Divorce Project.

Wallerstein and Kelly's influential California Children of Divorce Project (1980b), is a major longitudinal study of the effects of divorce on children. It also has a data-base of case histories in a psychodynamic tradition. Although the authors claim that their sample is representative of a normal divorcing population, it is seen by most commentators as clinical or quasi-clinical. Participating families were offered an initial 6-week divorce counselling service, to be followed by longer-term research/counselling interviews. News of the service was relayed by lawyers, teachers, counsellors, social agencies and others, and some families were referred through the courts (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b, page 319).

The project, started in 1971, is a ten-year study of children ranging from pre-schoolers to adolescents at the time of their parents' divorce. Of the 60 families who originally participated, members from 56 were re-interviewed a year later and again in 1977 and 1981. Among the 131 children are 18 adolescents (seven boys and eleven girls) between the ages of 13 and 18 at the time of separation/divorce. At the five-year follow-up three boys and

nine girls who were adolescent at divorce were re-interviewed<sup>1</sup> (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b, page 334). The ten-year report does not identify this group, merging all those over the age of nine at first interview. This study has become one of the chief sources of information about age-related responses to divorce, but the small number and wide age-range of the adolescent subjects provides a somewhat flimsy basis for its authoritative standing in the adolescent divorce literature.

The authors report clear patterns of behaviour according to developmental stage at separation. Pre-school children respond with fear, bewilderment, self-blame and regressive behaviour. Those in "early latency" express sadness, fear and anger. Some suffer from loyalty conflicts; boys of this age especially long for their absent father and have fantasies of reconciliation. The nine to twelve year olds, in "later latency", are more poised and understand the separation better. They are able to articulate their anger and sense of confusion. Some develop somatic symptoms and others align themselves with one parent against the other.

Wallerstein and Kelly had expected that adolescents would be less openly distressed at the time of the divorce than pre-school or primary-school children. Instead they are surprised at the intensely painful reactions they observe. Adolescents react with anger, shame and embarrassment, and with great unhappiness to the breaking up of the family. They express anxiety about their own future marital happiness and some become involved in loyalty conflicts. The authors attribute the intensity of these reactions to the interaction of divorce with normal developmental processes. They argue that in the intact family emotional separation from parents takes place gradually. The adolescent experiments with independence and maturity in fits and starts, and the family provides a safe place of retreat. During this time attitudes to parents undergo a gradual change from idealisation to a more realistic understanding of parents as individuals. Wallerstein and Kelly point out that when

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are given in *Surviving the breakup*, Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b. In a separate article Kelly (1981) refers to eighteen adolescents being "examined" at the five-year follow-up. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b, Appendix A, p.333) note that 30 of the original sample of 131 children and adolescents were not re-interviewed at Year 5, but data were obtained from parents for 25 of these subjects. It may be that six of the adolescents included in Kelly's report are from among this group, and therefore that information about their heterosexual activities was gained indirectly (i.e., from parent interviews).



divorce occurs at this time it removes the safety net. Adolescents may be precipitated into pseudo-maturity before they are ready. Parents are suddenly seen as vulnerable and less than perfect. Just when adolescents are learning to cope with their own sexuality, they are confronted with parents' involvement with new sexual partners. Instead of the young person preparing to leave home, a parent goes. Parents are preoccupied with their own anxieties and teenagers may find themselves in a reversed role, giving emotional support rather than receiving it. They argue that all these reversals of normal family processes contribute to the blurring of generational boundaries, a situation regarded as undesirable by psychodynamic theorists. Their stress on the need to keep these boundaries distinct stems in part from the view that Oedipal troubles re-emerge at adolescence. Unambiguous resolution of the Oedipal crisis is seen as a pre-condition for satisfactory love relationships in adulthood; de-investment of primary love objects may be hindered if boundaries between the generations are not preserved.

Wallerstein and Kelly find their 18 adolescents fall equally into three broad groups at Time 1. The first group experience regression, either temporary or more prolonged. The temporary form is a transitory emotional response to the divorce, often involving disruption to school performance and sometimes sexual acting out. More prolonged regression tends to be associated with emotional dependence by a parent on a child, creating an exclusive, infantilising relationship which prevents normal adolescent development from taking place. A second group responds with increased maturity and competence, supporting parents emotionally without being drawn into over-dependence. The last group react initially by distancing themselves and showing little concern for their parents, but at the one-year follow up these are among the best adjusted. It is not clear how many fall into these "groups", but presumably the  $n$  is rather small, perhaps three in each of the first subgroups, and six in the other two.

Kelly (1981) reports that most adolescents are less acutely distressed when re-interviewed between twelve and eighteen months later and are progressing satisfactorily, with the exception of those with pre-existing psychological difficulties whose problems have been exacerbated by the divorce.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) report that five years later a third of the total sample of children and adolescents are coping successfully, a little over a third are mildly or severely depressed or experiencing developmental disruption, and the remainder fall into a "middle" category. They do not report results for adolescents independently, remarking that age differences in response are less marked than before, but comment that the group who are now 17 to 24 are better able to accept and understand the divorce than younger children. Child outcomes are associated with the degree of post-divorce conflict, the quality of parenting by the custodial parent, and the nature of the child's relationship with the non-custodial parent. The child's personal resources and pre-divorce history are also seen as important, as is the availability of support from family and friends.

In a separate article Kelly (1981) paints a more negative picture of long-term adolescent adjustment. She writes that at the five-year follow up five of the original 18 adolescents are assessed as being in good or excellent psychological condition, three are at an adequate level, and ten (i.e. over half) are "in need of extensive psychological intervention". (See footnote on page 30 for a comment on this sample.) She does not specify the nature of these psychological problems nor whether these subjects are those with disorders pre-dating the divorce (as noted at the one-year follow up), but does comment that one boy's problems are compounded by an accident causing brain damage. The focus of Kelly's paper is on the capacity of this group of young people to form satisfactory heterosexual relationships. Her conclusions are pessimistic. Two thirds of the sample, including almost all the best adjusted, hold a very negative view of marriage. The well-adjusted adolescents are unwilling to commit themselves to a relationship, desiring high quality intimacy but anxious about failure: the poorly adjusted are highly sexually active in the context of relationships described by Kelly as empty and immature. She concludes that disillusionment or excessive dependency needs are the outcome of witnessing family breakdown at this vulnerable stage of development.

At the time of the first and second interviews Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) find that boys are more severely distressed and take longer to recover, on average, than girls. By the third interview these differences have diminished, as have clearly age-specific responses. Ties with the same-sex parent appear to become more salient as children grew older. At all

phases of the study the quality of the relationship with the mother is important for both sexes, and the value of a good father-child relationship seems to increase as adolescence approaches. Children in the custody of a psychologically disturbed mother are especially vulnerable.

Wallerstein and Kelly found it hard to predict future adjustment accurately from results at the first interview. Few held to the original level of assessment, although the greatest stability was among older subjects. Only two-thirds of the children and adolescents initially assessed as coping well remained in this category at the five-year follow-up. Seventy-five per cent of those initially in the poorest group improved, especially those who had experienced a marked improvement in their family situation. Those in the middle category were the least predictable.

Ten years after first contact a further round of interviews was carried out. The preliminary results group together those who were 9 years or older at the time of separation (Wallerstein, 1985). This group consists of sixteen males and 24 females aged 19 to 29 and is therefore not identical with, but presumably includes at least some of the group who were adolescent at separation. Half the sample are still completing their education: among those who have left school or college most have relatively unskilled jobs and about a third are unemployed, despite the fact that the original sample consisted largely of middle class families. Twelve have been involved in moderate to serious delinquency. Pregnancies outside marriage have occurred in eight cases, four of which were terminated.

Wallerstein does not report on levels of psychological adjustment, but she finds far greater understanding and acceptance of the divorce than before. Many feel that having lived through the divorce has made them stronger and more independent. She remarks on the vivid memories of the events of ten years ago and the sense of having missed out on family life. Contrary to Kelly's earlier findings, Wallerstein reports that most of these young people hold positive views about love and marriage, and believe they have learned from their parents' mistakes. There is still evidence of fear of failure among a sub-group.

Wallerstein concludes that the experience of being a child of divorce has left a lasting impression, in the form of regrets about the past and anxieties about future relationships. In addition it is evident that material difficulties are also experienced by about a quarter of the

sample. These include poor job prospects caused by leaving school early, lack of financial support for completion of tertiary training, and pregnancy or early marriage.

A 1983 paper by Springer and Wallerstein (presumably not part of the above study) describes the response of 14 adolescents aged 12 - 14 years whose families were counselled approximately eight months after separation. A semi-structured format was used by the clinician who interviewed the adolescents in one to four one-hour sessions. This paper pays more attention to cognitive aspects than is the case in reports of the previous study: the adolescents' capacity to draw inferences from parents' behaviour is seen as enabling most to anticipate and understand the separation. There is also less emphasis on overt emotional response, and more on specific sources of difficulty - a sense of loss of the family as a working whole, embarrassment at public knowledge of family affairs, increased conflict (as well as support) in sibling relationships. The adolescent capacity to maintain distance is noted again as an adaptive coping device. Two cases of violence against parents are recorded.

The work of Wallerstein and Kelly provides much rich and detailed information. The rapport built up by in-depth interviews is attested to by the remarkable retention rate of the families over a ten-year period, although it is not clear how many individuals were re-interviewed at each interval. By collecting data during the divorcing phase and following up the subjects over time, both the impact of divorce at specific developmental stages and also its longer term effects can be charted. A wealth of information about the families provides a context in which to view a particular child. It is a land-mark in divorce research, and has become extremely influential. Because of its widespread influence it is necessary to examine the extent to which its findings can be generalised.

Although the sample is described by the authors as nonclinical and children with a known history of psychopathology were excluded, the method of recruitment clearly indicates that counselling was sought and received by family members. Pre-existing but undiagnosed problems were subsequently found among adolescents (Kelly, 1981, page 135), and 50 per cent of both fathers and mothers were judged to have been "moderately troubled" during the life-history of the marriage. This group comprised, "Chronically depressed, sometimes suicidal individuals, (those) with severe neurotic difficulties or with

handicaps in relating to another person or . . . problems in controlling their rage or sexual impulses" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b, page 328). In addition 20 per cent of wives and 15 per cent of husbands had histories of severe psychopathology including disorders such as paranoia and manic-depressive psychosis. Thus 70 per cent of the women and 65 per cent of the men whose families participated in the study were deemed to have been moderately to severely impaired.

Divorce is a highly stressful experience and transient reactive responses are to be expected, but these results suggest a high level of chronic disorders. It is likely that the counselling programme associated with this study has influenced participation. People seeking divorce counselling in Marin County, California, which has one of the highest divorce rates in America, may have had special problems or unusual anxiety about their children. The extent to which the sample can be regarded as representative of a general divorcing population is doubtful.

A further consideration is that psychodynamic intervention encourages the expression of emotional conflicts and sees dangers in close parent-child bonding at adolescence: the influence of the counselling programme on the results must therefore also be recognised. Presumably this contact was benign, but it may have elicited responses in line with the theoretical frame-work of the interviewers, and the intervention itself may have affected outcomes in unanticipated ways.

Another difficulty is the somewhat impressionistic reporting of the results. It is not always clear on what basis a finding is made - how many subjects it refers to, nor whether groups overlap. Some interview data is coded and subjected to analysis of variance, correlation, and factor analysis (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b), but results, details of the procedures and the numbers included in each analysis are not reported. It is difficult, therefore, to assess the validity of the findings and their interpretation.

Some support for these findings has been offered by other researchers using quantitative means. Kalter and Rembar (1981) coded and quantified data for 144 adolescent and latency outpatients with divorced parents, developing an Emotional Disturbance scale, and examining the relationship between adjustment and age at marital dissolution. They find no evidence that the timing of divorce is related to the degree of later emotional disturbance,

but there is a significant relationship between age and type of disturbance for divorces before age six. This research does not parallel that of Wallerstein and Kelly, as the records do not detail responses at the time of divorce, but Kalter and Rembar comment that many of the emotional and school problems described as characteristic of latency and adolescent youngsters by Wallerstein and Kelly are present in their sample over five years post-divorce. It could be argued, however, that since these youngsters experienced divorce in infancy these responses may in fact reflect current distress, rather than confirming Wallerstein and Kelly's pattern of age-specific divorce response. In addition these patterns of response (described as "subjective psychological problems, academic problems, intense angry feelings with parents") are related only to those experiencing divorce prior to age six.

The most telling problem with the Californian Children in Divorce study is that it contains no control group of non-divorcing families. The implication throughout is that dysfunctional behaviour is the result of divorce, but what are the rates of maladjustment, delinquency, school drop-out, ex-nuptial birth and other misadventures in the general population of children and adolescents in this area? No standard measures of adjustment with norms based on a general population are used. Findings therefore depend entirely on the insight of clinicians and their assessment of whether observed behaviour is normal. This is a particularly important point since the focus of the study is on the impact of divorce on developmental progress, and yet there is no comparison group from the same cohort.

Another difficulty is that some accounts of the study tend to run together family experiences that pre-date the actual separation with those that have occurred since divorce, allowing the reader to infer that poor child outcomes are a result of family break-up per se. Parental psychopathology or violence in the intact family preceding divorce may leave its mark, but an account of the effects of divorce on children should clearly distinguish between pre- and post-divorce family pathology. Wallerstein herself reports (1985) that a third of the sample claim in the 10-year interview that they were relieved that the separation had removed them from these problems. Thus although the study documents the harmful effects of conflict on children, it also provides evidence that divorce can be a solution and opportunity for positive growth after life in an unhappy intact family.

### Summary of Results of Clinical Studies

Despite caution in generalising the results of this study, and others based on clinic samples, much is to be gained from this body of research. Case histories draw attention to variability within the divorcing population. They document individual experiences of loss and pain, although there is a danger that these reactions may be over-interpreted as pathological, since Schoettle and Cattle (1980) have shown that children's affect and behavioural problems following divorce are frequently of a transient nature. Where the clinical studies are especially valuable is in drawing attention to children whose particular vulnerability may place them at risk when parents part, such as those with pre-existing psychological problems. Although the studies tend to emphasise the problems of the least coping children, they also show that parent-child relationships are of critical importance in mediating divorce adjustment. Struggles between parents, violence, rejection, or compensatory overprotection undermine adjustment, just as warmth, support and guidance can help a child to cope. A continued relationship of good quality, where possible with both parents, emerges from the Wallerstein and Kelly study as the strongest buffer against the sadness and loss of family break-up.

### **Divorce Adjustment: Survey and Measurement Studies**

Non-clinical survey and interview studies of the effects of divorce on children adopt a very different approach from that of the clinical case-history, with emphasis on standard measures or coded interview responses, comparison groups and statistical analyses. (While these may be more methodologically rigorous, they also have weaknesses including problems of variability in populations sampled, variables examined and methods used.) Unlike the more broad-ranging clinical approach, survey-type studies generally limit themselves to a small number of specified predictor and outcome variables and for this reason the present review groups studies according to outcome measures and predictive and mediating variables. Recent studies have commonly used self-concept, anti-social behaviour or school adjustment as dependent measures. Among adolescents, attitudes to marriage and sexual relationships have also been used. With increasing recognition that divorce adjustment is multi-faceted, a range of mediating factors has been examined. These include

intra-familial, socio-demographic, parental and child variables. Family conflict, parent-child relationships, social support, parental psychopathology, age of child at separation and sex of child and sex of custodial parent, are among these factors. Studies comparing subjects according to divorced and intact family structure are first discussed by outcome variable employed, followed by a section examining findings relating to specific mediating variables.

### Survey and Measurement Studies:

#### Comparative Studies of Subjects from Divorced and Intact Families

Since Herzog and Sudia's 1971 review, studies examining a simple relationship between adjustment and divorce have given way to those examining intervening variables. However the question of whether - on balance- children and adolescents of divorce are disadvantaged is still asked. A brief review of this comparative literature follows, arranged in terms of outcome variables employed. Only survey and measurement studies employing a comparison group from intact families are included in this section. Many studies include a wide age range.

#### Self-Concept

Self-concept is an appropriate outcome measure for use in studies of the effects of divorce on children. It is a good measure of overall well-being and social competence, and there is also considerable evidence that self-esteem is strongly influenced by relationships with significant others (Coopersmith, 1967; Mead, 1934; Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1981a; Rogers, 1951).

Comparisons of children and adolescents from intact and separated families using various standard measures of self-concept have produced results which give a largely positive picture. Slater and Haber (1984) find no differences among Georgian high school students from intact and divorced families on the the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, and Devall, Stoneman and Brody (1986) report no differences in overall Self-Worth scores among Georgian pre-adolescents on Harter's Perceived Competence Scale.

A number of studies using the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale report no differences according to divorced or intact family structure. Among these are Australian



studies by Ochiltree and Amato (1984) with Victorian adolescents recruited through high schools; Partridge and Kotler (1987) with a sub-sample of mother-daughter dyads from the previous sample; and Smiley, Chamberlain and Dalgleish (1987) in a Queensland study of seven to 11-year-olds. American studies finding no family structure differences on this measure include those of Berg and Kelly (1979) with Ohio nine to 15-year-olds; Raschke and Raschke (1979) with a large sample of third, fifth and eighth-grade Virginian children; and Pardeck and Izikoff (1983) with sixth to eighth-grade New Orleans students. A high-school based study embracing three U.S. geographical areas by Feldman and Feldman (1975), also finds no differences according to family structure in interviews including a self-concept measure.

In contrast, lower self-concepts among adolescents from separated homes are found on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale by Rosenthal, Peng and McMillan (1980) in a large New York high school sample, and Harper and Ryder (1986) find deficits on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory among boys from single-parent families at a Sydney Catholic high school.

Of the studies described above only two out of eleven find lower self-concepts among children and adolescents whose parents have parted. The discrepancies may be due to differences in measures used or in population characteristics. Divorce still carries a stigma in some communities, so children from a Catholic sample, such as that of Harper and Ryder, may experience more discrimination than do those from other groups. It should also be noted that writers do not usually relate results to norms even though standard measures are used. It is therefore difficult to judge whether a significant group difference implies poor adjustment, or whether group results - though different - both lie within a normal range.

A series of studies using a simple adjective check-list has been carried out by Parish and associates with Kansas and Iowa school and college samples. The Personal Attribute Inventory for Children (PAIC), designed by Parish and Taylor (1978), is described as an "evaluative-affective" measure of self-concept. Subjects are required to check the 15 adjectives which best describe them from a list of 48. This team has reported lower self-concepts for subjects from single-parent but not remarried homes (Young and Parish, 1977; Parish and Taylor, 1979; Parish and Dostal, 1980b), no differences according to marital

status among college students (Parish, 1981), and differences according to family happiness but no main effects for family structure among children and adolescents (Parish, Dostal and Parish, 1981). A more recent study by Nunn, Parish and Worthing (1983) shows deficits for children and adolescents with separated parents; and a prospective study (Parish and Wigle, 1985) finds positive and stable self-concepts among intact families over three years, and equally stable but less positive results for intact, unhappy families. Subjects from divorced homes at Time 1 have significantly lower self-esteem, but at follow-up have improved markedly and have higher self-concepts than those in intact unhappy homes, while those whose parents have divorced since the first study show a significant decline.

These results show children from happy intact homes faring consistently well, and those from separated families doing as well or differing according to a number of factors. Taken together, they appear to show that the current family climate is an essential mediating variable in both intact and separated families. The mixed results from this group of studies, in contrast with the largely positive results from those discussed above, may be due to socio-cultural factors in the mid-western communities studied, or to differences between the PAIC and other standard measures. The adjectives used in this evaluative-affective measure are likely to be sensitive to transient emotional responses, as demonstrated in the prospective study described above, but do not tap a broader range of aspects of self-evaluation.

Combining the results of both groups of self-concept studies, eleven find no significant differences according to intact or separated family structure, three find definite deficits for children from separated homes, and four report mixed results. On balance, then, the evidence does not support an assumption of poor self-image among children and adolescents from separated homes, and the findings clearly show the need to look further at intra-familial influences.

#### Other Self-Report Measures

Studies examining adolescent psychopathology, goal-directedness and school-related problems (Kurdek and Sinclair, 1988), locus of control (Parish, 1982), and children's emotionality (Bernard and Nesbitt, 1982) find no differences according to family structure. Amato (1987), reporting the results of the Australian Institute of Family Study's project on

children in families, finds few differences. Primary-school children in step-families have lower reading and self-control scores but, overall, adolescents with separated parents differ little from those in intact families. Adolescents from one-parent and two-parent families are essentially equivalent on a range of measures of general life skills, while there is more variability among those in step-families. Nock (1982), in an analysis of 8,224 American adults finds largely positive long-term results for those whose parents separated before they were 16. Those who had lived with single mothers are less trusting of others, but their measures of social estrangement and general life satisfaction compare favourably with those from intact families. Nunn, Parish and Worthing (1983), however, find Kansas children and adolescents with separated parents evaluate their home and school life less favourably and are more anxious. As with the self-concept studies, the pattern is inconsistent, with least optimism from the Parish research.

#### Anti-Social Behaviour

There is considerable evidence that high levels of family conflict are associated with anti-social behaviour in children and adolescents (Rutter, 1971; Emery, 1982), and this issue is discussed below. However there is conflicting evidence about the relative incidence of deviant behaviour in intact and separated families, and causal inferences are by no means clear. A difficulty in this research is separating out behavioural problems that are part of a transient emotional response to family crisis, from long-term anti-social behaviour. The picture is further complicated because of the confounding of father-absence with sub-cultural disadvantage and urban delinquency. Early studies of samples of juvenile offenders report a high incidence of adolescents from "broken homes", giving rise to the view that delinquency is caused by family break-down. This position has been widely questioned. Evidence based on delinquent samples is dubious since sub-cultural and disadvantaged groups are disproportionately represented in prison populations, and these social groups are likely to be at greater risk of trouble with the law because of their lack of social influence (see Hennessy, Richards and Berk, 1978, for a critique of this literature.) Using a school-derived sample of adolescents, Nye demonstrated as early as 1958 that children from separated families committed only slightly more offences than those from intact homes, but were twice as likely

to be institutionalised, because of their greater social vulnerability. Hennessy et al (1978), employing regression techniques, find no evidence of a relationship between family structure and sixteen delinquency items among 1,240 middle class Kansas high school students. Gender and grade are more powerful predictors, with boys predominating, but girls having higher means on five items.

Using less powerful analytic tools, Stewart and Zaenglein-Senger (1984), however, find a consistent relationship between delinquency and divorce and other family problems among 1,088 high school girls in Michigan. Only chi-square and correlational analyses are reported, with no correction of alpha level for multiple comparisons, so evaluation of these results is problematic. A major study by Dornbusch, Carlsmith, Bushwall, Ritter, Leiderman, Hastorf and Gross (1985) examines inter-relationships between family structure family decision-making and deviant behaviour in a national sample of adolescents interviewed between 1966 and 1970. Families with step-fathers are not included in the main analyses, the comparisons being between two-parent families and those with mother only and mother plus another adult. They find a consistent and significant relationship between self-reported deviant behaviours and single-parent family structure, although these are stronger among male than female adolescents. Controlling for social class makes little difference. When the home contains another adult deviance is significantly less. A relationship is also found between level of deviant behaviour and decisions made by the adolescent alone rather than by parents or jointly. These results suggest that single-parent mothers have difficulty in controlling adolescents - especially their sons. A final regression analysis examines the joint effects of family type, sex, race, family income, parental education and adolescent decision-making. Family type and adolescent decision-making contribute significantly to the final regression equation ( $p < .001$ ), however only 2 per cent of the variance in deviation measures is explained. This result draws attention to the fact that a significant result does not necessarily indicate a large incidence of delinquency: a small but systematic difference may be highly significant in a large sample. In interpreting this study it is therefore important to be aware that coming from a single-parent home should not be seen as a powerful predictor of delinquency, although it is associated with some greater risk. Furthermore the target group of mothers without a partner may be a group still in transition,

unrepresentative of the wider divorcing population where re-partnering is usual. Glenn and Shelton (1983) argue that over-reliance on explained variance in divorce studies may result in neglect of real findings which affect a substantial proportion of individuals. While this point is well taken, there is also a danger that results such as those of Dornbusch et al will be generalised uncritically, perpetuating a stereotypic expectation of delinquency in children of divorce.

While evidence from different studies is inconsistent, it seems likely that both psychological and sociological factors may increase the likelihood of anti-social behaviour among some children from separated homes, but mediating variables such as inter-parent conflict and social class preclude simple conclusions on the basis of family structure alone.

#### Educational Consequences and Economic Disadvantage

When children are going through a family crisis it is reasonable to expect that school performance and adjustment may be temporarily affected by emotional tension and disruption at home. To what extent divorce is associated with long-term educational disadvantage is less clear. Fogelman (1984), reports that deficits in school attainment in the British National Child Development Study among children from separated homes disappear when controlled for family income: children from intact families in similar circumstances suffer comparable disadvantages. Furstenberg, Peterson, Nord and Zill (1983) reveal that children in black families in a national American sample are one and a half times more likely than whites to have undergone family disruption by early adolescence, and are significantly more likely to remain in a single-parent family. Espenshade (1979) also presents evidence that marital instability is more common among the poor, thus pre-divorce parental education and socio-economic status may mediate children's school performance. However even among those not previously poor, loss of income is a frequent sequel to divorce, especially among supporting mothers (Espenshade, 1979; McDonald, 1986) intensifying pressures on adolescents to leave school early or to forgo further education. Educational disadvantage spills over into expectations for the future, as Lambert (1978) shows in a report on the same longitudinal British study. She reports significant differences between sixteen-year-olds from one and two-parent families in terms of intention to remain in the educational system

and future job aspirations. The need for a well-paid job is prominent among reasons given for future occupational choice among those from single-parent families, although the majority of jobs chosen are not high status ones and seem to be realistically related to length of education.

Furstenberg and Seltzer (1983), find American children from a national sample who have experienced family disruption are more likely to have academic and behaviour problems at school, compared from those in happy, stable families; this difference diminishes, but does not disappear when racial and socio-economic factors are controlled. Krein (1986) and Mueller and Cooper (1986) also find educational and employment disadvantages for adults raised in single-parent families using large U.S. samples, but the results either disappear or diminish markedly when controlled for socio-economic and racial factors. Krein, for example, finds the sole-parent group are more likely to be black, Southern, have more siblings, less well-educated parents, lower family income and to have left school earlier. Controlling for these background variables, boys from single-parent families leave school only six months earlier on average, and there is no difference in the earning power of the two groups when educational level is controlled. Mueller and Cooper (1986), however, find that even when educational and unemployment differences are removed, those reared by single parents remain somewhat economically disadvantaged, are more likely to have their first child earlier and to divorce. Saucier and Ambert (1982) find Canadian adolescents from separated homes also have lower expectations about the future and lower educational aspirations.

Family disruption, it seems, carries the risk that adolescents may leave school earlier, and that this educational disadvantage may affect job prospects, as Wallerstein and Kelly (1980a) also noted. There is evidence, too, that some cultural sub-groups are at greater risk both of family break-up and of poverty. (The ways in which economic aspects of divorce may impact on children are discussed more fully below.)

### Sexuality and Marriage

The possibility that children with separated parents may have difficulty forming satisfactory relationships with the opposite sex comes both from psychoanalytic and social

learning theory. Studies examining this question commonly categorise subjects according to whether a divorce has been experienced or not, with little attention paid to the age at which separation occurred. Apart from the case-history work of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980a), none has examined a group who were adolescent at the time of separation.

An influential early study by Hetherington (1972) compares adolescent girls from intact, widowed and divorced homes, using a variety of observational, interview and measurement techniques, and concludes that girls from divorced homes are inappropriately provocative and forward with males, whereas those whose fathers have died are shy and awkward with the opposite sex; these effects are more pronounced among girls who were under five when parents separated. There were only 24 divorced mother-daughter dyads in the sample, and these are unusual in that no male has lived in the home since the father's absence. Essen and Lambert (1977) note that only 0.3 per cent of the 17,000 children in the British National Child Development Study remain in a single parent home throughout their childhood, and there is no reason to believe that American rates should differ greatly. Since re-partnering is common, especially among younger women, those mothers whose daughters were infants at divorce and have remained single may be seen as atypical. Despite these limitations the results have been widely cited in the literature, and generalised indiscriminantly. Attempted replication of the study with college students by Hainline and Feig (1978) was not successful.

A number of studies have examined attitudes to marriage, family life and divorce among adolescents whose parents parted during their childhood. Essen and Lambert (1977) find few differences in attitudes in response to interview questions between sixteen-year-olds from the NCD Study who had lived at some time in one-parent families and those who had not, although they report that Ferri (1976) finds differences in 11-year-olds from the same sample using an essay-writing task. Ganong, Coleman and Brown (1981) find no differences in attitudes to marriage among Kansas 15 to 17-year-olds, while Paddock-Ellard and Thomas (1981) find young Florida adolescents with divorced parents are less positive than those from intact homes.

When college students are surveyed few differences are found. Robson (1983) finds no differences in a small matched sample of Canadian students from intact and separated

families in attitudes to marriage, predicted age of marriage, dating patterns or sexual experience. Stevenson (1987), finds no differences in intimacy in heterosexual relationships between Baltimore college students whose parents are together or separated, but does find that intimacy scores are related to the quality of father-offspring ties in both groups. When the father-child scores are controlled, the divorced group show greater intimacy and share more interests with their partners. Booth, Brinkerhoff, and White (1984) examine attitudes and behaviours among 2538 Nebraska college students of whom 365 have parents who are separated or divorced. Those from divorced families report higher levels of courtship behaviour (including pre-marital sex), but satisfaction with their partner is equal to those from intact families except where there is high post-divorce conflict and a decline in relations with their parents. Students from unhappy intact marriages are also somewhat more likely to have engaged in premarital sex. The authors suggest that parental role models (i.e. dating among divorced parents) may account for these results, but do not find evidence to support a hypothesis of divorce-bred attitudes of caution, limited commitment, or poor parental supervision.

An Australian study (Carmichael, 1986) examines attitudes to marriage among unmarried 18 to 34-year-olds. High proportions of both males (87 per cent) and females (85 per cent) expect to marry, so those who reject marriage represent less than 15 per cent of the total sample. Of those from intact families the majority expect to marry, but over half of those who reject it are also from intact homes. Compared with those who want to marry, the non-marrying young people are more likely to have grown up without two natural parents, come from poorer blue-collar homes, and describe their childhood home as unhappy. The majority of these respondents want a close relationship but do not believe that marriage guarantees happiness. A pattern of non-traditional attitudes is evident among this group, and women's responses especially suggest adherence to feminist ideals.

A number of studies have looked at whether divorce in childhood, affects patterns of marriage and divorce in adulthood, speculating that unhappy childhood homes may result in early marriage (with increased risk of marital failure), or alternatively make people over-cautious of commitment. Marriage break-down among children of divorce might be attributed to emotional difficulties, poor conflict-resolution skills as a consequence of



witnessing parents' disputes, or to economic and social correlates of parental separation. Mott and Moore (1979) compare married women from a U.S. national longitudinal survey with those who separated or divorced between 1968 and 1979, and find that those whose parents separated are significantly more likely to divorce. They also find that youthful marriages are more likely to break up, and that lower educational attainments, but no other economic indicators, predict poor marriage outcomes. This may reflect a tendency for young people from unhappy homes to compensate by going into marriages too hastily (perhaps at the expense of completing their education), as findings by Waite and Spitze (1981) also suggest. However, this pattern may be rather different in the present Australian cohort, where experimental cohabitation is increasingly common, and age at first marriage is rising for both males and females (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1988a). Carmichael (1986) finds that younger age at first marriage among Australians is associated with lower level of education, early dating and pre-marital pregnancy, while those who marry later are more likely to believe in trial marriage. Parents' marital happiness is not related to early marriage for either sex in this large national sample.

Kobrin and Waite (1984) also find that family disruption in childhood is linked - though rather weakly - to decreased probability of marriage. They point out that different patterns exist for black and white American families. Black men and women are significantly less likely to marry over all, but an interaction effect is evident, with parental separation linked to diminished probability of marriage for white women and for black men only. Glenn and Kramer (1985) find measures of psychological well-being among women - and to a lesser degree men - from a national longitudinal sample are associated with childhood family structure, and they suggest that this may be mediated through the higher divorce rate characteristic of these women.

As with so much research in this area, it is hard to draw clear conclusions about the degree to which divorce affects heterosexual attitudes and behaviour. Over all it seems that some individuals may respond by adopting a more sexually liberated life-style, but there is also some evidence of increased caution, and perhaps greater realism among children of divorce. Evidence from numerous studies suggests that differences according to family structure diminish when mediating variables are taken into consideration. Reason for family

break-up, age at which this occurred, sex of child, quality of family life and of parent-child relationships and socio-economic factors have all been shown to affect attitudes and behaviour. Finally, in summarising findings caution is needed when comparing across cohorts at a time when the nature of male-female relationships is under radical revision. Earlier judgements about “inappropriate” sex-role behaviour are open to reappraisal in the light of more recent views, and changing attitudes to pre-marital cohabitation appear to be affecting marriage patterns.

### Summary of Findings of Comparative Studies

Studies comparing adolescents and children from intact and separated homes over the last decade and a half have examined adjustment in areas of self-concept and other self-reported measures, anti-social behaviour, educational consequences, and heterosexual attitudes and behaviour. The majority of studies found no difference in self-concept or other self-report measures according to family structure. There were some indications of higher rates of anti-social behaviour among boys from divorced homes, but the results are not consistent across studies. Educational disadvantage among some children of divorce is linked in complex ways to socio-economic factors. There is evidence from adult studies of a higher rate of divorce among those whose parents divorced, but the majority of studies of adolescents and college students find few differences in attitudes towards marriage, although, again, these findings are not consistent. The importance of mediating variables has been shown repeatedly, and the next section examines factors that cross-cut family structure, or that contribute to within group differences in adjustment.

### Survey and Measurement Studies: Variables Mediating Adjustment

#### Family Conflict

An early study by Nye (1957) questions the prevalent assumption that divorce per se is damaging, by comparing adolescents from unbroken unhappy families with those from broken homes, using a large (750) sample of randomly selected Washington high-school students. Nye's hypothesis is that life in a highly conflictual intact family is more damaging

to adolescents than living with a single parent or step-parent. This prediction is supported: adolescents in broken homes have less psychosomatic illness, less delinquent behaviour, and better adjustment to parents than those in unhappy intact homes. When socio-economic status is controlled this difference still remains. Nye's study is an important step in separating family processes from family structure, although it does not differentiate between happy and unhappy broken homes, nor report comparisons with happy intact families. McCord and McCord (1959) support these results and Raschke and Raschke (1979) take them a step further. They find Virginian children and adolescents from separated homes have self-concepts no different from those in matched intact families, but adjustment is significantly worse among those from high conflict homes irrespective of family structure. These results are not only found in American studies. In South Africa, Rosen (1979) finds that only in cases where divorce conflict was highly acrimonious are children less adjusted than those from intact families, and Brun (1971) reports that Danish children and adolescents caught up in a bitter divorce have a higher chance of emotional trouble. A Greek study (Rassidakis, Lissaios, Vassilopoulos and Athitakis, 1984) reports a significantly higher rate of childhood family conflict among adult cancer patients and suggests that childhood stress may be a risk factor for some individuals, predisposing them to this disease.

Cline and Westman (1971) point out that bitter conflict can carry over into the post-divorce period. They report that 31 per cent of consecutive cases with children in a Wisconsin family court had repeated and intensive court actions following divorce. In addition Westman, Cline, Swift and Kramer (1970) found that of 153 cases in a child psychiatry clinic, all the 15 per cent with divorced parents were from families reporting hostile or non-cooperative post-divorce relations. Similarly, Kurdek and Blisk (1983), in a follow-up study, found children's adjustment was strongly affected by continuing conflict after divorce.

Conflict in Intact Families. A link between conflict and boys' anti-social behaviour, as rated by teachers, is demonstrated by Rutter (1971), in a London study of families where one or both parents had been in psychiatric care. The percentage of disturbed boys in intact families is significantly related to interviewers' ratings of the quality of the marital relationship. No instances occur where the marriage is harmonious, but the rate increases

from 22 per cent to 39 per cent in the “fair” to “very poor” marital categories. Where the experience of conflict is prolonged - as when a conflictual marriage ended in divorce but was followed by a second poor marriage - the rate of disorder is found to be double, however where the family situation improves the rate of anti-social behaviour is significantly reduced. Rutter draws the conclusion that the ill-effects of family disharmony are reversible.

There are conflicting findings concerning the type and degree of response to family conflict of boys and girls. Rutter (1971, 1981) reports that parental discord is consistently associated with anti-social behaviour in boys but not girls, and that family conflict is associated with neurotic disorders in neither sex. Whitehead (1978), however, finds both boys and girls are affected. Examining data from 2,775 first-born children from the British National Child Development Study, gathered at the 7-year-old follow-up of this large, representative sample, she finds evidence of both emotional and anti-social responses to domestic tension in each sex, although higher proportions of boys are rated as “hostile” and girls as “emotionally maladjusted” or “highly strung”. She also reports that ongoing domestic tension has a far higher association with maladjustment than divorce, separation or desertion, although there is some evidence of antisocial behaviour among boys and withdrawal among girls whose parents had separated.

Porter and O’Leary (1980) and Emery and O’Leary (1982), examine these issues with a sample of 64 children and adolescents from intact families attending a New York children’s clinic. Their results support Rutter in that the first study finds significant correlations between overt marital hostility as rated by mothers, and boys’ - but not girls’ - behavioural problems. Some support for Whitehead can be seen, however, in that a scale measuring boys’ psychological problems (Immaturity/Inadequacy) is affected as well as those measuring Conduct Disorder and Socialised Delinquency. Among girls the Socialised Delinquency scale approaches significance at  $p < .059$ . There are no relationships for either sex between child problems and mothers’ general marital unhappiness. The second study uses the same measures with an additional child report of level of family conflict and perceived non-acceptance. Significant congruence is found between the children’s awareness of conflict and unhappiness in their parents’ marriage and their parents’ own reports. Again a relationship is found between marital discord and boys’ - but not girls’ -

behavioural problems. However, this time the main association is found with the children's own measure of family conflict and not the parents' overt conflict scale. The strongest associations reported in this paper are between girls' conduct problems and their perception of non-acceptance by their parents, while this measure of acceptance/rejection is unrelated to boys' adjustment scores.

These results strengthen the view that marital turmoil in intact families is linked to child disturbance. They also suggest that the child's perception of the family provides an important guide to this association. Whitehead's findings are partially supported in that anti-social behaviour and other psychological difficulties are found among both boys and girls, although boys appear to be differentially affected by conflict, and girls by lack of acceptance by parents. Although these studies are based on relatively small clinic samples, they add to the evidence that family conflict, happiness and parent-child relationships are strongly implicated in child adjustment and they point to the need to be aware that boys and girls may experience and respond to family tensions in different ways.

Conflict in Longitudinal Studies. Further evidence of the ill-effects of parental conflict in intact families and of differences between boys and girls is provided by two prospective studies based on data from a Berkeley longitudinal study (Block, Block and Morrison, 1981). Interviews with both parents about child-rearing practices in 1968, when children were aged three and a half, are correlated yielding an agreement/disagreement score. This measure of inter-parent conflict predicts marriage break-up rates ten years later ( $p = .007$ ). Disagreement scores are then correlated with teachers' Q-sort ratings of child adjustment at ages 3, 4 and 7, and psychologists' at age 7. Global scores of "ego control" and "ego resilience" for each age are subsequently derived from these items. Parents who disagree about how to handle their children are significantly more likely to have sons with lower I.Q., less resilience and less ego-control at three and a similar, though less marked pattern at subsequent age intervals, while girls have better control and their resilience is unaffected. In a second study, Block, Block and Gjerde (1986) examine this sample when children are aged 14-15. Parents in 60 families were still together, while 41 had separated or divorced. Child characteristics at ages three, four and seven are then examined in terms of adjustment before separation occurred. Boys whose parents later separated are found to be consistently

less well-adjusted than those whose parents stayed together, and this is evident at age three (up to 11 years before the marriage ended), the implication being that these children had been exposed to a high degree of parental squabbling over an extended period. By contrast the three-year-old girls from families later divorced are rated as exceptionally well adjusted. By four their reports are less positive and include the stricture that they “tend not to behave in a sex-typed manner” and are not “calm and relaxed”. At seven these girls have mixed ratings, although some of the negative characteristics ascribed by the authors - for example “not eager to please”, “not getting along well with other children” - could be seen as evidence of greater assertiveness and less conformity to traditional feminine behaviour than girls from conventional families. The positive characteristics reported include “having high performance standards for self”, “high intellectual capacity”, and - a somewhat curious asset - “readiness to feel guilt.”

The analyses by Block et al are intriguing. They seriously question the assumption that child disturbance in divorce is a simple consequence of parental separation, and they once again emphasise the potential harm to children of living in a family where there is parental conflict. The data are especially valuable for being gathered before children have become labelled as problematic - either as clinic patients or as “children from broken homes”. These findings support Rutter’s view that boys tend to be more affected by parental conflict than girls, and that the way this is expressed is mainly through under-controlled and aggressive behaviour. Girls, on the other hand, seem well adjusted at age 3 and present a less conventional profile than those from traditional families at later ages. Parental disagreement, then, may affect the sexes differently: perhaps girls benefit in having an assertive mother, whereas this poses more of a threat for boys. Alternatively, reverse causality may be operating: difficult boys may place strains upon a marriage, provoking disagreement about management methods resulting in continuing conflict and family stress. This explanation does not account for the girls’ results, but a variety of causal mechanisms may be operating.

It is interesting to find a second longitudinal, prospective study reporting long-term negative associations between parent conflict at age three and psychological adjustment 15 to 19 years later. Chess, Alexander, Korn, Mittelman and Cohen (1983) have followed up

subjects from the New York Longitudinal Sample from infancy. By ages 18 to 22, 27 per cent of the 132 subjects had parents who were permanently separated. Multiple regression analyses reveal no differential effects for boys and girls, but show that family conflict in early childhood, not separation, divorce or parental death, predicts adjustment in young adulthood. Most subjects accept their parents' separation without long-term disturbance, although temperamental factors, accompanied by high levels of hostility during and after divorce make the experience traumatic for some young people. Again a reversed causality interpretation is possible, but taking the two longitudinal studies together, it seems clear that doubt has been cast on the assumption that divorce per se is a sufficient explanation for child disturbance, whereas family turbulence in early childhood, whether parents are together or not, is associated with long-term adjustment problems.

Immediate Effects of Parental Conflict. Turning now to the effects of parental fighting before and immediately following divorce, a study by Jacobson (1978a), looks at child adjustment among 51 three to 17 year-olds interviewed within 12 months of parental separation. Fifteen families are from an adult crisis unit and 15 from Los Angeles court records. Pre-divorce hostility is significantly related to scores on a standard behaviour check-list, with stronger relationships occurring for older (seven to 13-year-olds) than younger children. The results are not reported according to sex, but it is interesting to note that contrary to Rutter's finding, there are strong relationships among the older subjects between levels of inter-parental hostility and scales measuring neurotic and psychotic behaviour, sensitivity, inhibition and social withdrawal, but not with anti-social behaviour or other measures of aggression. Aggression reaches significance only among the younger children, but for this group, too, family conflict is linked to neurotic behaviour, and especially to fear. A weaker association also exists between child adjustment and parental conflict during the fortnight preceding the interview. Thus recent post-divorce conflict is also linked to child adjustment, but parental fighting when both parents are still together is more likely to take place in the presence of the child and to be associated with high levels of disturbance. In this study severity of inter-parent conflict is measured by a searching list of items answered by the mother who also completes the child's behaviour check-list. (Items include questions about violence, extreme anger and death wishes against the spouse).

The lack of independence of these measures raises the question of the reliability of parent estimates of children's responses. For example, Young (1983) finds children's measures of divorce-adjustment are uncorrelated with those of custodial parents, and Matteson (1974) finds parents overestimate their level of communication with adolescents. Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky (1981) report parents' assessments to be related only to children's positive feelings about divorce, and Kurdek and Berg (1983) find no significant correlations between children's self-reported problem thoughts and parents' ratings of their adjustment. Although assessment both by parents and children seems desirable, there is some doubt about the reliability of parents' reports following divorce.

Jacobson's study points to the importance of examining differences within a divorcing sample by highlighting the contrast between bitter and relatively cordial separations. (Too often researchers equate divorced family structure with conflict without consideration of the nature of pre- and post-divorce relations, or of the time expired since parents broke up). It adds to the accumulating evidence of a robust association between parental conflict and child adjustment, and to the view that responses are not restricted to anti-social behaviour but cover a broad band of psychological disturbance. The strong effect for older children and adolescents is of particular interest.

Comparisons of adolescents in intact and separated families using multivariate techniques and standard measures of conflict and adjustment confirm the association between family conflict and disturbance found in earlier adolescent studies. Slater and Haber (1984) find no differences using standard measures of self-concept, locus of control and anxiety, between adolescents from intact and divorced families from an American high-school sample, but a highly significant relationship ( $p < .001$ ) between self-esteem and family conflict as measured by the Moos Family Environment Scale. Since separation had occurred over one year ago in 84 per cent of cases, the results are taken to indicate that ongoing high conflict is deleterious in both intact and divorced families. Farber, Felner and Primavera (1985) also use the Moos measure. They find that levels of family cohesion and conflict are the most salient predictors of self-image in their sample of late adolescents and young adults whose parents had separated when they were aged between 12 and 21. Those who were younger at separation are less anxious (perhaps indicating a crisis-recovery effect), and



females are more anxious and depressed than males. Poorer post-divorce adjustment is related to stress associated with family re-organisation and high conflict. Similar results are found in a correlational analysis by Kurdek and Sinclair (1988), using the same measure of family conflict. They find no differences in a high-school sample between adolescents from intact, single-parent and step families on three measures of adjustment, but there are significant correlations between adjustment and inter-parent conflict and family environment. This pattern is stronger for intact than separated families, although trends are similar for all groups using a rigorous alpha level to correct for possible Type 1 errors when making multiple comparisons.

Conflict in Australian Studies. Australian studies have also examined the links between conflict and child and adolescent adjustment. Bennington (1986) reports correlations, in a sample of Victorian marital problem families, between children's perception of inter-parental conflict and their self-concept, academic progress and home and school behaviour. Ochiltree and Amato (1984) find high family conflict to be related to poor self-esteem in Victorian primary and secondary students, irrespective of whether they are from intact or separated families. Partridge and Kotler (1987) make a detailed examination of 54 mother/daughter dyads from the above sample. They match intact, single-parent and bereaved subjects and find quality of family environment, but not family structure, differentiates between levels of adjustment and self-esteem. In an interview study with New South Wales adolescents from a divorce court after-care sample, McLoughlin and Whitfield (1984) find adolescents prefer life in a one-parent home to a highly conflictual two-parent family, but post-divorce conflict is also highly disturbing.

Whereas much of the literature has been based on the assumption of a linear relationship between high conflict and poor adjustment, Burns (1980) points out that post-divorce adjustment may have an inverse relationship with pre-divorce conflict. In her Sydney sample of 335 divorced men and women, parents report a higher level of difficulty in adjustment among children whose pre-divorce families had been non-conflictual, compared with improvement among those whose family had been turbulent (American studies by Landis, 1953, and Fulton, 1979, also reports this effect.)

Children as Scapegoats in Family Conflict. Skevington (1982) argues for a more discriminating view of conflict, taking the view that a certain degree of family conflict is beneficial for children's development and that it is the type of conflict that is crucial, rather than parental disagreement per se. She demonstrates this in a Western Australian sample by showing differences in the type of conflict and communication between marital counselling and control group couples. But she also makes the disturbing discovery that 50 per cent of both groups report increased irritability with children following conflict with a spouse. Findings by Preston (1986) go even further in linking post-divorce parental conflict with emotional abuse of children. In a survey of 98 families referred to the Australian Family Court counselling service in Parramatta, N.S.W., four types of separated families are identified. These range from non-abusive families, where parents are co-operative, have not pursued litigation, and have preserved a clear hierarchy of relationships and authority, to severely abusive families characterised by litigation, escalating conflict, coalitions between family members, repeated denigration of one parent by the other in the presence of the child, and in some cases a history of parental psychiatric disorder. These studies bring out graphically the way in which children can become the victims of parental discord.

Summary of Conflict Studies. The studies reviewed above have varied widely in populations sampled, methods used and measures employed. Emery (1982) in a searching review of the research to that date points out that many findings have to be accepted with caution owing to methodological problems, among which he singles out biased sampling, non-independent data, and measures lacking in reliability and validity. To these could be added over-reliance on correlational data; failure to adopt a sufficiently rigorous alpha level in correlational analyses using multiple comparisons, and the use of outcome measures that do not examine a broad enough band of child adjustment, or which incorporate discredited assumptions about sex-appropriate behaviour. However Emery points out that despite differing flaws, the studies are remarkably consistent in their results. It could also be argued that though individual samples have characteristics which restrict their generalisability, this can be seen as a strength rather than a weakness. The combination of specific results provides evidence of a widespread phenomenon, found in clinic, court and school populations, intact and separated families, children and adolescents, and families of different

nationality and social status. Studies using a wide range of measures and sources of information, build up a multi-faceted picture. Taking the literature as a whole it presents convincing evidence that life in a family with embattled parents is highly aversive for children, and harmful to their psychological development. Behavioural indicators suggest that boys may turn more to anti-social behaviour than do girls, but there is ample evidence of diminished self-esteem and other forms of psychological distress in both sexes. Evidence that girls are less disturbed by conflict than boys appears in some studies, but is not a consistent finding throughout. A question of considerable interest is whether exposure to conflict in childhood leads to long-term problems (Block et al, 1986; Chess et al, 1983); or whether improvement in the family situation reverses the deficit, as studies showing good adjustment in children and adolescents in conflict-free post-divorce families seem to indicate, and as Rutter (1971) has found. Furthermore, not all children from conflictual homes experience psychological impairment. Other factors that mediate adjustment require examination.

### Parent-Child Relationships

Overseas Studies. The finding that child adjustment is affected by family conflict in both intact and separated families draws attention to the importance of intra-familial processes. Rutter (1971) was among the first to demonstrate this empirically. He found that even when marital relations were very poor, a good relationship with at least one parent significantly lowered the probability of deviant behaviour among boys from intact families. The implications for families in divorce are manifold.

There is now considerable evidence that the quality of parent-child relationships is closely associated with child adjustment in both intact and separated families, and plays an important part during the period of family restructuring immediately following divorce. Hess and Camara (1979) compare nine to eleven year-olds from matched groups of 16 separated and 16 intact families in a well-designed multi-method study and find that family process variables explain a larger unique proportion of variance in child adjustment measures than does family type. They show that both intact and separated families vary greatly on such issues as communication about child-rearing, interest in the child's school and social

life, and time spent with the child. Parental harmony following divorce, they find, is less important than good parent-child relationships. Children who have a warm relationship with both parents are best adjusted, although one good relationship is significantly better than none. (A similar pattern is also found for children in intact families.) In this study all children are living with their mothers; the authors find the quality of the relationship with the father rather than its frequency is important. They argue that it is not divorce itself, but the threat to primary bonds that interferes with a child's development, and they draw attention to the importance of examining post-divorce family relationships with follow-up studies so these processes can be better understood.

Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1979) also draw attention to the part played by parent-child relations during the post-divorce period. In their two-year study of preschool children they find that children's adjustment deteriorates in the first year after divorce during a period of family disorganisation and stress for the mother. Mother-child relations are tense during this time but improve dramatically in the second year, as the family system begins to restabilise. By the second year after divorce, girls show few signs of distress but boys take longer to recover, and mother-son relations continue to be more disturbed.

A number of overseas studies show a strong link between the adjustment of children and adolescents and the quality of relationships with parents. A British study by Walczak and Burns (1984) cites the post-divorce relationship with each parent as the strongest influence on children's adjustment. In America, Emery and O'Leary (1982) report conduct and personality problems in intact families for girls (but not boys) who regard their parents as rejecting. Rosenthal, Peng and McMillan (1980) find perceived parental love to be the best predictor of self-concept among adolescents from both intact and single-parent homes. Kopf (1970) reports that the adjustment of adolescent boys is related to maternal attitudes of acceptance or rejection, and also to mothers' attitudes towards their ex-husbands. Berg and Kelly (1979) find children and adolescents from intact-rejected families have significantly lower self-concepts than those from divorced or intact-accepted families. Pett (1982) reports that a positive relationship with the custodial parent is the strongest predictor of social adjustment among 411 children of divorced parents. Other studies emphasising the salience of family processes include those by Cooper et al (1983), Farber et al (1985), Guidubaldi,

Cleminshaw, Perry, Nastasi and Lightel (1986); Harris and Howard (1979); Kurdek and Siesky (1980); Kurdek and Sinclair (1988); and Slater and Haber (1984).

Among the Kansas research by Parish and associates discussed above are a series of studies examining children's and adolescents' scores and their ratings of parents on the PAIC adjective checklist (Parish and Dostal, 1980a, b; Parish, 1981; Parish, Dostal and Parish, 1981; Parish and Nunn, 1981; Nunn, Parish and Worthing, 1983). These indicate that children from intact families evaluate their parents more favourably than do those from divorced families. Children from unhappy families (divorced or intact) rate their mothers and fathers significantly lower. A prospective examination (Parish and Wigle, 1985) appears to show that recently divorced parents drop markedly in the estimation of their children, while evaluations of both mothers and fathers rise as time passes. This may indicate de-idealisation of parents at divorce, as observed by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980a). However, as noted above this measure includes such adjectives as "angry" "afraid" "gloomy" and "happy" (Parish and Taylor, 1978), and the results could therefore be seen as a realistic description of the emotional states of parents during the family crisis, rather than indicating low evaluation. (In contrast, Essen and Lambert (1977) find few differences in parent evaluations according to family structure among sixteen-year-olds from the British National Child Development sample.) The Kansas research demonstrates the need to include measures of time elapsed since separation in divorce studies and to conceptualise divorce adjustment as a time-related process. The inter-relationships found between self-reported scores and ratings of parents are interesting and underline the interactive nature of family processes.

Australian Findings on Parent-Child Relationships. Australian research in this area is more sparse, but similar findings have been reported. Ochiltree and Amato (1984) find children's and adolescents' self-esteem is related to family processes rather than structure. Partridge and Kotler (1987), examining a sub-sample of the previous study, report family climate (including parent-child relations) explains significantly more variance in adolescent self-concept and general adjustment than long-term father absence. Hodges (1981) finds little difference between adolescents from intact and divorced families in their assessment of their home life as happy and satisfying, and comments that the quality of parent-child

relations has a high priority for these young people. Harper and Ryder (1986) differ from the previous authors in finding significantly lower self-esteem among boys from divorced families in an inner Sydney Catholic high school, but they also find that adjustment scores are strongly linked to measures of the quality of parent-child relationships as perceived by the boys. Thus although sampling differences appear to have affected comparative results, the salience of family processes is consistent with previous studies. A Canberra study by Cooper, Holman and Braithwaite (1983) demonstrates that children's self-esteem in single-parent cohesive homes is lower than those from similarly cohesive intact homes, but is significantly better than those from families which are divided, contain strong coalitions, or in which the child is isolated. This interesting study takes an important step forward in focusing on internal family structures, rather than the usual divorce/intact dichotomy.

Dimensions of Parent-Child Interactions. Many of the studies reporting the salience of family processes are vague about the nature of a "good" parent-child relationship. Often this is seen purely in terms of warmth and closeness, but dimensions of control and protection are also important. Santrock and Warshak (1979) adopt Baumrind's (1968, 1971) classification of parenting styles in their investigation of post-divorce adjustment in six to eleven-year-olds. They find that social competence is highest when the custodial parent - mother or father - adopts an "authoritative" style of parenting, involving verbal give and take, affection, and firm but non-punitive rule enforcement. Authoritarian (autocratic) or permissive (over-indulgent) parenting styles are less successful. Guidubaldi et al, (1986) also examine these parenting dimensions in a sample of primary-school children from divorced homes. They find authoritarian parenting is the least successful style, with authoritative and permissive styles yielding mixed results for boys and girls of different ages.

As noted above, Dornbusch, Carlsmith, Bushwall, Ritter, Leiderman Hastorf and Gross (1985) present data which show that permissive parenting carries the risk of anti-social behaviour. They apply an analysis based on Baumrind's concepts to rates of adolescent deviance derived from U.S. data from the 1966-70 National Health Examination Survey. Parenting styles are operationalised in terms of scores on a measure of family decision-making with three factors: parent alone, adolescent alone and joint parent/

adolescent decisions. They find, as would be expected, that the older the adolescent, the higher the rate of autonomy, but controlling for age, they also find that adolescents in single parent homes are significantly more likely to make decisions alone and that this is associated with higher rates of deviant behaviour. The presence of another adult in the single-parent home strongly attenuates this effect. The results suggest that some single mothers, especially those with adolescent sons, have difficulty in controlling them. However, as mentioned above, this study needs careful interpretation as very little of the variance in deviance scores is explained by family structure ( $R^2 = .01$ ) and adolescent decision-making raises this only marginally ( $R^2 = .02$ ). The measures of decision-making used are also a little shaky, having reliability coefficients ranging from .63 to .69.

Issues of control and autonomy are especially salient at adolescence, and while anti-social behaviour may be associated with under-control by parents, there is evidence that over-control also has negative correlates. Weiss (1979b) reports that a non-hierarchical family structure works well when adolescents are living with a single-parent, especially when the parent is working. In these families adolescents share tasks and achieve responsibility and autonomy a little earlier than those with both parents present. In Australia, Harper and Ryder (1986) show that poor self-esteem is associated with parental over-protection as well as lack of care among adolescent boys; and Amato (1987) reports that coercive punishment is linked to poor adjustment at any age, but parental control is positively correlated with self-esteem for younger children, while the relationship is negative in adolescence. Although there has been considerable emphasis on researching under-controlled behaviour (see Emery, 1982), there has been less interest in the other side of the coin - the effects on children of over-intrusive and protective parenting following divorce. The disruptive adolescent may be more visible than one whose problems are internalised, but over-control is likely to be especially damaging at a time when independence and identity issues are paramount.

Parent-Child Relations and Custody Issues. The indications that the quality of parent-child relationships mediates child adjustment are highly relevant to decision-making about matters of custody. The question of whether children and adolescents are better off with a parent of the same sex has been a topic of some debate. As already noted, Hetherington,

Cox and Cox (1979) report greater strain with sons than with daughters among divorced mothers of pre-school children. Santrock and Warshak (1979) and Warshak and Santrock (1983) cite evidence that eight-year-old boys and girls fare better with the parent of the same sex, but Lowenstein and Koopman (1978) find no difference in self-esteem between boys of nine to fourteen living with single-parent mothers or fathers. The better adjusted boys are those who see their non-custodial parent once a month or more. This issue is by no means settled (Clingempeel and Reppucci, 1982), and little is known about the effects of custody by the cross-sex parent at adolescence.

Rosen (1977) maintains that freedom of access to each parent is highly desirable at adolescence and advocates it as a means of mitigating the sense of being "caught in the middle". Richards (1982) also argues for the desirability of continuing contact with both parents, pointing out that exposure to two parents enriches a child's life and creates stronger ties with grandparents and other family members on both sides.

Parental Coping and Child Adjustment. The study by Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1979) referred to above draws attention to stresses placed on relationships between the custodial parent and the child in the aftermath of divorce. Other studies also report an association between children's and adolescents' difficulties and parental stress or poor coping, both in intact families and in the post-divorce period (Fulton, 1979; Furstenberg and Seltzer, 1983; Kurdek, 1987; Kurdek and Blisk, 1983; Kurdek and Berg, 1983; Pett, 1982; Rutter, 1980; Stolberg and Anker, 1983; Woody, Colley, Schlegelmilch, Maginn and Balsanek, 1984). It is understandable that parents who are coming to terms with their own grief find it hard to handle children who are distressed and confused, indeed as Kurdek points out, the direction of these findings is by no means always clear. In some cases parental psychopathology may be the root cause of family break-up, with effects on children pre-dating separation, and in others difficult children may have put a strain on the marriage as well as exacerbating parents' post-divorce adjustment. In either case it is most likely that parent-child relationships are interactive, and it does appear that when the custodial parent is competent and well-adjusted youngsters seem to pick up more rapidly following separation.

Continuing Relations with Fathers. Because the majority of children live with their mothers, less attention has been paid to post-divorce relationships with fathers. There is



now considerable evidence that both parents are important in a child's life following divorce, but that the quality of the relationship is the essential factor. Feldman and Feldman (1975) carried out an interesting study on the relative influence of mothers and fathers on self-concept and other measures of school and social adjustment in a large, geographically varied sample of North American adolescents. They find no difference between boys and girls from families where the father is present or absent in terms of adolescent self-concept, nor in quality and extent of parenting by the mother and the child's identification with her. In seeking to explain this they hypothesise that many fathers in intact families may in fact be psychologically unavailable to their children. Their findings show that in both types of family fathers are consistently less involved, even in areas traditionally seen as a father's domain, such as discipline and help with homework. Does this mean that fathers are irrelevant? The authors disagree. They compare children of highly interactive fathers with those who are less involved, and find a consistent pattern of better adjustment at school and at home among the former. Jacobson (1978b) adds to the evidence that fathers who interact with their children are highly salient to them. She examines the impact of change in the amount of time spent by each parent with three to thirteen year-olds from 30 families during the first year after divorce. One child was in joint custody but the rest lived with their mothers. There is a consistent relationship between decreased time with father (but not mother) and children's behaviour problems, with a stronger effect for seven to thirteen year-olds than for younger children. The greater the drop in time spent together, the poorer the child's adjustment. Jacobson points out that parental separation is often equated with creation of a single-parent family, but that in fact there is great variability in the degree to which the non-custodial parent maintains a parenting role. Hess and Camara (1979) conclude that the quality of the child's relationship with his or her non-custodial father is of equal importance and separate from the relationship with the mother. Kurdek (1987) finds that high paternal involvement and frequent visitation is linked to the good adjustment of ten-year old boys and girls, and Warshak and Santrock (1983) report similar results for the non-custodial parent of either sex. Stevenson (1987) shows that the post-divorce relationship with fathers is influential even for older adolescents. He examines the quality of the relationships that college men and women have with their fathers, and finds it predicts the

closeness and intimacy of their relationship with their partners whether or not their parents are divorced.

Some Australian findings are similar to those of the Feldmans. Amato (1987) reports that Victorian adolescents with supportive mothers and fathers, and whose fathers are not autocratic, are high in social competence. Perceived support from mothers varies little between the sexes and across family structure. Interestingly, there is little difference between time spent with fathers across family types, although non-custodial fathers are seen as providing less psychological support. About a third of those in intact and separated homes wish they had more time with their father and see him as unavailable because of long working hours.

Generalisations about parent-child relationships after divorce have to be modified by an appreciation of the dynamics of particular families. Burns (1980) points out that continued contact with a father may be counter-productive in highly conflictual families, especially where there is a history of violence, and Amato (1987) reports that primary school aged girls with close relations with both mother and father actually experience more distress than those who are more distant to one parent - perhaps suggesting a painful conflict of loyalties. There is also considerable evidence that links with the non-custodial parent do in fact diminish markedly with the passage of time (Burns, 1980; Furstenberg, Peterson, Nord and Zill, 1983; Hirst and Smiley, 1984).

Children's Relations with Step-Parents. A number of studies reported above have shown considerable continuity in the level of mother-child relationships across different family structures. There is less agreement about the nature of children's relationships with step-parents. A mother's remarriage may place some distance between herself and her children, as the results of Nunn, Parish and Worthing (1983) seem to show. A number of studies indicate no significant differences on a range of outcome measures between children and adolescents from intact and step-families (Booth et al, 1984; Kurdek, 1987; Nock, 1982; Parish and Taylor, 1979; Parish and Dostal, 1980b; Raschke and Raschke, 1979) but there are some indications that relations between children and step-parents may be somewhat strained, especially in the early years of the marriage (Amato, 1987; Furstenberg and Seltzer, 1983), and that the step relationship may be especially difficult for adolescents to

handle (Hodges, 1981; Mitchell, 1985). Clearly the nature of the relationship between children and step-parents varies greatly and depends on many individual circumstances. The finding that conflict mediates child adjustment holds just as true for re-married homes as for intact and single-parent families, and includes relationships between adults and children as well as hostility between spouses. Ochilree (1986) shows that self-concept among Australian adolescents in step-families is related to the same family process variables that affect children in intact and single-parent homes. Those with high self-concepts have a warm and supportive family environment, have a good working relationship with the step-parent, accept the original separation, and have not been involved in repeated family disruption. Those with lower self-esteem are in conflict with the step-parent, have experienced multiple changes of household and some have still not accepted the break-up of the original family.

#### Divorce Adjustment According to Sex and Age

Sex Differences. The previous review has indicated that some sex differences exist in children's adjustment to divorce. Drawing these results together, there is evidence that pre- and primary-school boys may be rather more strongly affected than girls by family disruption (Burns, 1980; Emery and O'Leary, 1982; Guidubaldi, et al, 1986; Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1979; Hodges and Bloom, 1984; Kurdek and Berg, 1983; Porter and O'Leary, 1980; Rutter 1971), but results for adolescents are less clear-cut. Many studies report no sex differences, or fail to report on response according to sex. Slater, Stewart and Linn (1983) report a surprising interaction effect with male adolescents from divorced homes having better self-concepts and girls worse ones than those from intact homes. Parish (1982) finds that male college students in step-families have a higher level of external locus of control than those whose parents are together, but Mitchell (1985) finds that among Scottish adolescents, males report less distress and a greater sense of relief than do females. Glenn and Kramer (1985) also report a stronger negative effect for females than males in a national sample using family status at sixteen as a predictor of adult outcomes. Amato (1987), Feldman and Feldman (1975), Koziy and Davies (1982), Kurdek and Sinclair (1988), and Reinhard (1977) find no sex differences among adolescents, and Booth,

Brinkerhoff and White (1984) report only slight differences in courting behaviour among late adolescent college men and women. Using deviant behaviour as the outcome measure, however, Dornbusch et al (1985) report a higher incidence among male compared with female adolescents from mother-only homes.

It appears that the widely reported sex differences favouring girls rather than boys in divorce may be less applicable to adolescents than to younger children. When a father leaves the home a young boy loses his main source of male identification - the person with whom he shares special interests and has fun. At this age divorce is not understood as something between parents, but is often taken as personal rejection (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b). For a girl the continuing relationship with her mother may shield her to some degree from the sense of abandonment. By adolescence young people are less dependent on family figures; boys in both intact and separated families spend more time with peers, and older males at school and in the community become alternative leadership figures. This is, after all, the age when achieving independence and differentiation from the family is a central task whatever the family structure. At the same time there is evidence that adolescence may involve more stresses for girls than for boys (Collins and Harper, 1978; Offer et al, 1981a; Rutter, 1980), so the early advantage that girls have as "the stronger sex" is no longer such a protection.

Time Elapsed Since Separation. Unfortunately reports frequently cite adjustment levels by age when sampled, without consideration of the time elapsed since parents parted nor of the developmental stage of the child at divorce. Studies which fail to control for the time that has elapsed confound age-specific and recovery-from-crisis factors, and ignore differing life experiences due to the length of time spent in a separated family. There is considerable evidence that recovery from the crisis of separation takes place over a period of time (Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1979; Smiley and Goldsmith, 1981; Wiseman, 1975). Furstenberg and Seltzer (1983) find recency of separation to be related to the extent of children's family and general life problems. Farber, Felner and Primavera (1985) report an inverse relationship between adolescents' levels of anxiety and time elapsed since separation, while Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky (1981) and Parish and Wigle (1985) find support for a process of recovery from crisis in their respective longitudinal studies.

Age at separation. The age at which parental separation takes place is also an important variable as stages of emotional and cognitive development may strongly influence how a parent's leaving is experienced and understood. Drawing together evidence presented above, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) distinguish characteristic responses according to developmental stages in their case-history study of families at the point of separation, but find that age differences diminish over time. Longfellow's re-interpretation of their findings (1979), adds a social cognitive dimension to their largely psychodynamic analysis. Combining both views it seems that pre-school children are likely to be distressed because of disruption to their primary relationships and also because of the egocentric level of their reasoning. Primary school children may be at risk because of the loss of a parent with whom they identify and also because social cognition is still immature and parental separation may be interpreted as abandonment. Although adolescents may have specific developmental difficulties, their more sophisticated social cognition is an asset in understanding both their parents' needs and their own position in relation to their parents.

Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky (1981) differentiate between children's emotional and social-cognitive responses to divorce and explore these dimensions among 8 to 17-year-olds whose parents have been separated for a mean of four years. They find that understanding of the divorce is related to a child's level of interpersonal reasoning, but his or her emotional response is unrelated to age. Better overall adjustment is associated with older age and also longer time since separation. Similar results are obtained at a two year follow-up when negative feelings have diminished considerably especially among the older subjects. There are indications from this and other studies that children who are older when their parents part fare better (Hetherington, 1972; Kurdek, 1987; Stolberg and Anker, 1983), while Hodges and Bloom, 1984, find less acting out but more depression.

Two other studies also point to the advantages of the greater cognitive maturity of adolescents in adjusting to divorce. In an English study, McGurk and Glachan (1987) investigated children's understanding of the continuity of the parental relationship following divorce by presenting a vignette about divorced parents, then asking: "Is he/she still the children's mother/father?" and seeking an explanation for the replies. They report three levels of understanding among 4 to 15 year-olds: 1) unquestioned assertion (fiat), 2)

conditional (on residence, parents' warmth towards children, re-marriage) and 3) recognition of permanence with differentiation of relationship and role. These levels are related to age. Only adolescents operate at the third level, understanding that marital and parental relationships are separable, and that genetic parenthood is permanent even when parent and child live apart. Thus divorce, for adolescents, can be understood as primarily concerning relations between parents, and does not necessarily threaten continuity of their own relationship with each parent.

Neal (1983) examined levels of inter-personal understanding by analysing clinical interviews with children and adolescents from recently separated families and found a developmental progression in their ability to understand complex adult feelings. Ability to understand divorce from the view-point of parents provides a way of making meaning of it. He stresses the importance of a child's ability to make sense out of events as a step towards coming to terms with them. This view is supported by the work of Taylor (1983), and is consistent with the emphasis on appraisal by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), in their research on stress and coping.

These results suggest that increased cognitive maturity at adolescence is a powerful aid to successful divorce adjustment at this developmental stage, and that this factor, in combination with higher general competence, independence from the family and emotional maturity provides them with greater personal resources than are at the disposal of younger children.

### Economic and Social Factors

The family is seen by systems theorists as an open system, operating within a broader context. Although the chief emphasis of this review has been on intra-familial mediators of adjustment, economic and social factors also affect child adjustment in divorce, sometimes directly and sometimes through their impact on parents. Marital separation frequently involves a steep decline in family income, especially for women, as has been shown by two major Australian studies (English and King, 1983; McDonald, 1986).

Desimone-Luis, O'Mahoney and Hunt (1979) found that five out of 25 children in a Washington study were maladjusted. The disturbed children all had mothers who had

experienced a 50 per cent drop in income at separation. Colletta (1979a) demonstrates that low income places stress on mothers, which in turn affects their handling of children. Where two groups of moderate-income working-class mothers are matched for education, occupation, ethnicity and religion there are few differences between those in intact or single-parent families in their handling of pre-school children, but a third group of low-income divorced mothers - similarly matched on the other demographic variables - make more demands on their children and expect more obedience from them as a consequence, it is argued, of the greater pressures they are under. In another paper Colletta (1979b) reports that low-income divorced mothers receive less help in coping with daily problems, poorer housing, and less financial support and are significantly less satisfied with the level of social support they do receive than a control group of married working-class women. Multiple stresses on mothers impact on children, in that those receiving the least support are more likely to have more household rules and to resort to more authoritarian punishment.

The indirect effects of reduced financial resources on education among adolescents has already been discussed, and it was shown that separated families are heterogeneous in terms of social and economic resources. This fact is often overlooked in studies which use divorced or intact family structure as an independent variable.

Social support unrelated to economic issues is also an important resource in coping with life events (Chiriboga, Coho, Stein, and Roberts, 1979). Homel and Burns (1987) demonstrate that when parents have good quality social support, children are happier and better adjusted, and Kurdek (1983) draws the same conclusion for young adolescents in divorced families. Jacobson (1978b) finds parent-child communication during divorce to be a strong predictor of child adjustment. She also notes the low over-all level of preparation given to children, commenting that parents are themselves often too involved in coping with their own turbulent feelings to be able to provide them with anticipatory socialisation. Where discussions take place it is more often with the mother than the father. Mitchell (1985) also comments on the lack of preparation for divorce among her sample of Scottish adolescents commenting retrospectively on their divorce experiences. She writes that many of these children had remained bewildered and isolated long after their parents had separated. A third of her subjects had had no-one to confide in when their parents parted, but others had gained

support from parents, grandparents, siblings and friends. Weiss (1979a) also reports that siblings are an important source of support.

### Factors Intrinsic to the Child

Anthony (1974a) observes that some children appear to be intrinsically more vulnerable than others. He argues that most children are not in need of psychiatric help when parents part, but the vulnerable child needs careful “convoying”. Why are some children more vulnerable than others? Rutter (1981) reviews the evidence that temperamental differences may affect children’s response to stress, and may elicit differing parental responses and Kurdek (1987) demonstrates that temperamental factors are associated with children’s divorce adjustment. Anthony (1974b) notes that parenting which encourages autonomy and self-esteem seems to provide a protective factor, but this again may well be the outcome of child-parent as well as parent-child interactions.

Children are not passive respondents, but active participants in family processes. Marotz-Baden, Adams, Bueche, Munro and Munro (1979) point out that their active, adaptive capabilities are often overlooked in divorce research. The child’s appraisal of the situation and his or her willingness to participate in processes of adaptation are important factors in the post-divorce family.

### Summary of Mediating Variables

This review has supported the argument that simple comparisons of adolescent adjustment according to divorced and intact family structure are naive. There is strong evidence that adjustment is mediated in complex ways that are likely to interact with one another and which cross-cut family structure. We have seen that the level of family conflict is strongly implicated in child adjustment whether both parents are together or not, although there is some disagreement about whether boys and girls are equally affected, and whether conflict is associated with problems of over-control (anxiety, depression) as well as under-control (antisocial behaviour). Adjustment has been shown to be associated with good quality parent-child relationships, but it was noted that the dimensions of these relationships at adolescence need further investigation. Both sex and age have been shown to mediate divorce adjustment, with younger boys showing greater distress than girls, and younger



children of both sexes having more adjustment problems than adolescents. It seems, however, that sex differences are less evident at adolescence. It was seen that divorce often involves economic disadvantage that may impact on children through the stress experienced by their parents, and also more directly in reduced educational and other opportunities. Finally it was noted that some children seem to be intrinsically more resilient or more vulnerable, and the importance of individual differences in coping ability was seen as a further mediating variable.

### **Longitudinal Studies**

A number of commentators have noted the need for well-designed longitudinal studies in order to examine long-term child adjustment following divorce, and to isolate factors predictive of adjustment over time. Few such studies exist. Only Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) have followed up adolescents close to the point of separation and over subsequent years, although a study by Parish and Wigle (1985) provides prospective data on a group where separation occurs within a three-year period. Self-concepts and ratings of each parent using the PAIC evaluation (see above) are compared for this group and three other family forms. As noted above, the longitudinal data indicates stability for intact families, an increase in evaluations for single-parent families to a point above that of unhappy intact families, and a marked decline in evaluations for the recently divorced. While this study documents an immediate response and a recovery process it lacks background or predictive information.

Hodges and Bloom (1984) examine recent divorce adjustment in a sample of 107 Colorado children over an eighteen month period. The adjustment of younger children is found to decline, but no time effect is found for children aged from seven to 18. Predictive data is not reported. A longitudinal study of primary-school children by Guidubaldi et al (1986) does not report time elapsed since divorce. They find that positive parent-child relationships at Time 1 (especially, for boys, with the noncustodial father), decreased conflict, and parenting style at Time 1 predict adjustment at Time 2. Bennington (1986) finds little difference between children from an Australian group of families with marital

problems over a two year period according to whether parents remained together or parted during this time.

Studies by Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky (1981) and Kurdek (1987) are well-designed and provide much information. The earlier study of a group of eight to 17 year-olds whose parents had divorced an average of four years previously, finds moderate stability in adjustment over two years and significant increases in positive feelings about the divorce. The second study examines twenty boys and girls with a mean age of ten, seen about two years after separation and a year later. Kurdek finds a number of measures at Time 1 are predictive of adjustment a year later. These are: low reactive child temperament, understanding of conflict resolution, social support, low maternal stress and high adjustment, co-operative parenting and frequent visits and phone calls from the non-custodial father.

A number of national longitudinal studies have also yielded information about long-term divorce adjustment though not all were originally designed for that purpose. A U.S. study had an original sample of 2,279 children: a sub-sample of 1,423 children (now adolescent) was contacted in 1981 (Furstenberg and Seltzer, 1983). Selection criteria for families were marital disruption or high conflict at Time 1, and for the control group, stability with low to moderate conflict levels. These authors report a systematic trend for lower scores among the "disrupted" group, although they note that most of these differences are minor and diminish but do not disappear when controlled for socio-economic status. They comment (page 15),

" . . . the great majority of children who have experienced disruption are rather well-adjusted. Only a small minority, even of those whose parents have married and divorced two or more times, are not performing satisfactorily at school . . . all of the measures we inspected suggest that marital disruption affects only a minority of children."

This is an interesting outcome considering that high conflict intact families are excluded from the control group and appear to be included among the "disrupted", thus loading the dice against the latter families.

As already noted, parental conflict, especially in infancy, is found to predict long-term adjustment problems in studies by Block et al (1986), Block et al (1981) and Chess et al (1983). Reports on the British National Child Development Study (Essen and Lambert, 1977) find little effect on later adjustment among those who have lived in single-parent homes, and Nock (1982) reports few differences between American adults who were living with one or both parents at age 16. Those differences that do emerge are positive, suggesting that the experience of family disruption may sometimes be a challenge which leads to greater strengths.

The longitudinal data are mixed but seem to suggest that disturbance diminishes with time for most children, although a minority is at risk of long-term difficulties. As Kurdek has pointed out (1987) surprisingly few studies use longitudinal data in a predictive way - showing relationships between factors at first contact and later adjustment.

### **Studies of Divorce at Adolescence**

As noted above, only six studies of subjects who were adolescent when their parent divorce took place could be found, two of which had samples of college students in late adolescence/early adulthood (Farber et al, 1983,1985). Design characteristics of the remaining four studies are summarised in Table 2.1, and the present research is also included for comparative purposes.

TABLE 2.1

Studies of Adolescents at Parental Divorce

<u>Authors</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Control Group</u>	<u>Method</u>	<u>Type</u>
Wallerstein & Kelly (1980b)	13-18	18	Counselling/Research	No	Clinical	Longitudinal
Springer & Wallerstein (1983)	12-14	14	Counselling/Research	No	Clinical/Interview	Cross-Sectional*
Young (1983)	12-17	111	Court Work-shop	No	Questionnaire	Cross-Sectional
Parish & Wigle (1985)	?	90	High school	Yes	Adjective check-list	Pro-spective
Dunlop (1988)	13-16	78	Family Court/High School	Yes	Standard measures/Interview	Longitudinal

\* This study reports results from the first stage of a planned longitudinal project.

Three of the four published studies have been discussed where relevant in previous sections. The study by Young (1983) has access to an excellent sample consisting of 112 children and 111 adolescents participating in a single-session court-mandated work-shop for children with divorcing parents. The data, however, are sparse, being descriptive in nature and based on four questionnaire items tapping anxiety, mother/father blame and anticipated ease of adjustment. Self-blame for the divorce was associated with anxiety, but those who blamed the father anticipated less adjustment difficulty. Results for adolescents and younger children were similar except that children who blamed their mothers (either solely, or with the father) anticipated greater difficulty in adjustment, an effect not found for adolescents. Unfortunately there is no attempt to evaluate adjustment according to normative measures in this ideal non-clinical, non-self-selected sample.

Comparison of these studies is difficult because of their differing sample sources and methods of assessment, but some conclusions can be drawn. It is clear from all three of the studies previously discussed (Parish and Wigle, 1985; Springer and Wallerstein, 1983; and Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b) that considerable emotional distress is experienced by many adolescents when parents first part, but the Parish and Wigle results show that negative

responses appear to be related to the closeness of the family crisis, and that recovery takes place over time. This study also demonstrates the negative effects of continuing to live in an unhappy intact family.

The case-history approach of the clinical studies brings out the variability in divorce response among adolescents, and allows examination of factors influencing adjustment. Among these, a good, stable relationship with both parents following divorce emerges as a key protection factor.

An interesting finding in the studies by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) and Springer and Wallerstein (1983), is that a coping mechanism used to good effect by adolescents is that of strategic withdrawal, a deliberate distancing of themselves from their parents' turmoil. Young conjectures that this coping mechanism also accounts for the absence in adolescents of the link found in younger children between blaming the mother and anticipating problems in their own adjustment. Springer and Wallerstein see this capacity as grounded in the adolescent's more highly developed social, cognitive and physical skills.

Although some of these writers see adolescence as a developmental stage of special vulnerability, there is evidence that adolescents also have strengths and capabilities that distinguish them from younger children, and that warrant further examination. The studies reviewed are essentially descriptive, and those reporting longitudinal results are lacking in evidence of factors at Time 1 that can be used to predict outcome in later years. Furthermore, only one longitudinal study contains a control group although this is essential in order to tease out divorce-induced from developmental effects over time.

### **Methodological Issues**

Much of the clinical research provides rich, detailed information about individual cases, but lacks the methodological rigour of empirical studies. The Californian Children in Divorce project by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) is outstanding in that it provides a continuing record of the responses of children and adolescents over a ten-year period from the point of separation. Despite its breadth and undoubted sensitivity, it suffers the disadvantages of a non-representative sample, no control group of non-divorced families and heavy reliance on theoretical and clinical judgements which are not open to scrutiny. Survey

and questionnaire studies, on the other hand, provide measures that can be critically examined and complex analyses of contributing variables. These are strengths, but surveys give information about group means and cannot rival the insights into children's personal experience gained by in-depth interviews. Those empirical studies which employ interviews alone are open to criticisms similar to those of the clinical case histories - interview-derived measures cannot always demonstrate validity and reliability, interviewer bias may be present, and control groups are rarely included. Few choose the best of both worlds by including both standard measures and personal interviews with subjects.

Much valuable information has been added to the foundation supplied by the earlier research reviewed by Biller (1970) and Herzog and Sudia (1971). Increased attention has been paid to design and analysis, although studies vary in their rigour. Blechman's review (1982) draws attention to weaknesses which are still not uncommon. These include unrepresentative sampling, operational definitions which narrow the group observed (e.g. girls in single-parent families without brothers) with subsequent generalisation to a wider population, measures with poor validity, an assumption of deviance which looks for negative outcomes (e.g. anti-social behaviour) rather than positive or bi-polar outcomes (e.g. self-concept), measures derived from sources known to be prone to bias (e.g. teachers, parents), over-reliance on correlational analysis, failure to control for confounds such as ethnicity, class and income, and failure to discriminate between developmental lag and long-term deficit. Since her review there has been increasing use of multivariate analysis to control for confounds, but many of Blechman's criticisms are still applicable.

Failure to control for age at separation/divorce, lack of information about whether scores on standard measures lie within a normal range and a dearth of longitudinal studies specifically designed to examine factors predicting adjustment are additional weaknesses in the literature.

A major difficulty is that the topic is not one that lends itself to precise measurement or manipulation. A problem in devising measures of divorce response is the great variability in family circumstances. Kurdek and Berg, (1987) have attempted to overcome this by developing a scale measuring children's beliefs about divorce; however this incorporates assumptions linking positive beliefs with good adjustment in a way that fails to account for

objective situations that may influence some children's construal of their families. A criterion adopted by these authors is that a child should not blame one parent for the divorce, but a negative view of one parent may be based on vivid experiences of violence and abuse. Positive correlation of this scale with poor psychological adjustment, then, may in reality reflect the well-documented relationship between conflict and maladjustment for some children. The difficulty in designing such a measure is to avoid confounding poor outcomes based on dysfunctional beliefs with those resulting from actual family circumstances.

There is no single class of "children of divorce". Over-reliance on controlled sampling may select out important mediating variables, while heterogeneous sampling includes such diverse families that results may be misleading even when covariates are employed. Lack of precision in generalising results is a common error in literature reviews, where studies of single-parent families (including never-married, deserted, and sometimes even widowed) are loosely referred to under the rubric "divorced". This practice blurs the important differences that exist in the circumstances of these groups, not least of which is the continued presence of both parents in the lives of many children.

Divorce is a painful topic and ethical considerations preclude research without consent. Except in rare cases samples are basically voluntary, even when recruited from the most exemplary source. Because of these difficulties it seems best to welcome the diversity of divorce research, and, as Emery (1982) has suggested, to look for patterns which are robust enough to emerge across a range of studies with differing flaws and varying populations.

### **Substantive Content : Conclusions**

Although clinical studies tend to accentuate negative consequences, and there are some inconsistencies among survey and measurement findings, it is possible to draw some general conclusions from the literature on the impact of marital dissolution on children and adolescents.

1. Parental separation is clearly a distressing experience for children and adolescents, but there is no firm ground for believing that, in itself, it causes psychological damage. Its impact varies according to pre- and post-divorce family circumstances.

2. There is strong evidence that family conflict is harmful to children of all ages, whether in intact or divorced families.
3. Parent-child relationships have been shown to mediate child adjustment, but greater attention needs to be paid to the nature of these relationships. While parental warmth has been shown to provide a buffer against family disruption, studies of parental control produce mixed results. There is a need to examine the consequences of parenting that is over-controlling in relation to a broad band of psychological adjustment, to compensate for the considerable research attention given to under-controlled behaviour in youngsters from disrupted families. Furthermore, the joint effects of differing levels of parental warmth and control merit examination.
4. There appears to be considerable evidence that young boys are more adversely affected by parental separation than girls. Few sex differences are evident at adolescence.
5. Only four studies, three of which have no control group, examine adolescent adjustment at the point of divorce: most research concerns those with previously divorced parents. A control group is essential to permit disentanglement of developmental and divorce-related processes. Psychodynamic theory leads to predictions of poor outcome for adolescents, while cognitive developmental theory suggests that increased capacity for abstract thinking and social cognition will facilitate understanding and hence coping. Clinical reports indicate intense reactions among adolescents, whereas survey and measurement studies find few differences between adolescents from intact and divorced families. These discrepancies may in part reflect a confounding of short and long-term divorce responses; they also suggest heterogeneity among adolescents. The evidence suggests that while the majority are not harmed, there is a more vulnerable minority.
6. Parental coping, quality of contact with the non-custodial parent, social support and economic and social factors have all been shown to contribute to children's adjustment following marital dissolution.



7. Only two longitudinal studies designed to investigate the impact of divorce at adolescence could be found. Of these, one is rich in information but is clinical in method and contains no control group, and the other examines only one facet of adolescent adjustment. There is an urgent need for longitudinal research able to identify factors that predict, rather than merely describe, adjustment over time. For those working with adolescents and faced with decisions about their future, predictive information is essential.

A set of hypotheses based upon the research reviewed above and the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1 is presented at the conclusion of the following chapter.

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## CHAPTER 3

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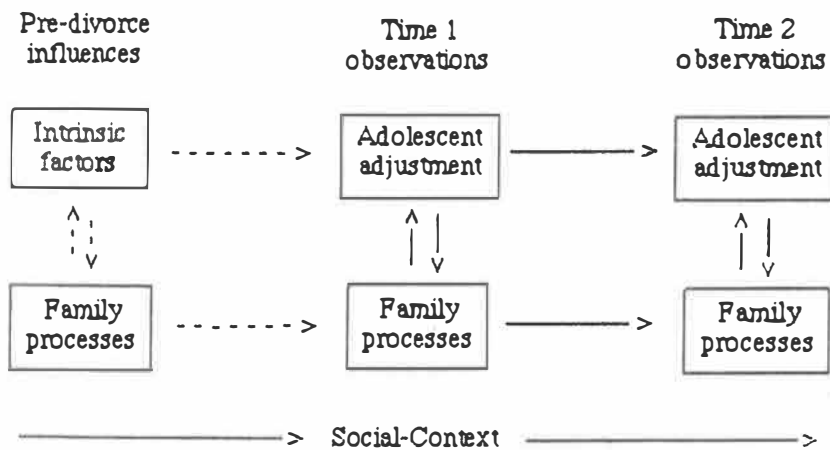
### SAMPLE AND METHOD

Most divorce studies have been cross-sectional although there is increasing recognition of the time-related processes involved. Divorce is not simply alteration in family structure. Complex, interactive processes within the family have their genesis well before the break-up and continue into the future. They also take place in a wider context which in turn affects, and is affected by, family events. The adolescent is at the crux of this process - changing developmentally, moving outwards from the family and yet still powerfully interconnected with it. In order to do justice to this temporal dimension, and to examine factors predicting adjustment over time, a longitudinal design has been adopted for this study. A control group of adolescents from non-divorcing families has also been included to avoid the confounding of developmental with divorce-related processes. Because of the ever-changing nature of the social context, a contemporary control group is an essential component.

#### A Model of Family Processes Over Time

It is not possible to include the full complexity of real life in an empirical study, but an attempt to express some of these elements of continuity and change graphically is presented in the following model. The adolescent at Time 1 is represented as already the product of social and familial processes together with factors intrinsic to the child. At this point we are able to tap into the nature of current influences, and to note whether their effects on adjustment are different in divorcing and non-divorcing families. At Time 2 a second cross-sectional view can be gained allowing us to see how processes occur in later adolescence and whether there are adjustment differences between those who have now lived for three years in a divorced family and those who have not. We can also examine continuity or change in both adolescent adjustment and family processes from Time 1 to Time 2, and may be able to isolate factors that predict adjustment and thereby identify those adolescents who are most vulnerable to family disruption.

FIGURE 3.1

Model of adolescent adjustment and family processes over time

This model embodies the integrated theoretical position outlined in Chapter 1 and can be read at three levels. From the perspective of developmental theory, change over time can be seen in terms of the need for parent-child interactions to be responsive to the developmental trajectory of the child. The symbolic interactionist perspective is represented by focusing on adolescents' perceptions of the nature of parents' interactions with themselves, and the incorporation of these perceptions into the self-image. At the family systems level the model conveys the operation of family processes over time, allowing family subsystems to be seen as continuing to function after changes in family structure. All three levels are represented as occurring within, and interacting with, a wider social context although the main emphasis of the present study is on the relationship between adolescent adjustment and family processes.

### The Design of the Study

The present research seeks to build upon the strengths of previous studies and to avoid their pitfalls where possible. A non-clinical sample of families at the point of divorce was obtained through the Family Court of Australia and a control group of intact families, with a similar socio-economic profile, was contacted through New South Wales state high schools, yielding a final sample of 78. Parents and adolescents were first interviewed in 1982; 82 per cent of adolescents were re-interviewed in 1985. Age and time since separation were

controlled. The methodological strengths of both interview/case history and measurement techniques were employed. In-depth semi-structured interviews with adolescents and both parents (where possible) were carried out to obtain qualitative information, and a battery of standard measures was administered to provide valid and reliable quantitative data. Multivariate techniques were employed, examining cross-sectional data at each time interval and allowing longitudinal prediction from Time 1 to Time 2.

It is hypothesised that at both Time 1 and Time 2 current family processes (but not family structure) will be associated with measures of adolescent self-concept, depression and anxiety. Process variables include the adolescent's perception of levels of family happiness and conflict, and of the nature of each parent's interactions with him or her, along dimensions of care and overprotection. Furthermore it is hypothesised that both family processes and adjustment levels at Time 1, will predict adjustment at Time 2. (A list of specific hypotheses is presented at the end of this Chapter.)

It is hoped to extend previous knowledge in several ways. By selecting a standard measure of self-concept specifically designed to tap areas of adolescent developmental concern, and by examining those aspects of parent-child relations which are relevant to the task of differentiation, it is hoped to extend understanding of the relationship between adjustment and family processes at adolescence in both family groups. The design is directed towards cross-sectional description and longitudinal prediction, with the intention of attempting to identify risk and protection factors at divorce that can predict outcomes three years later, thus building on but going beyond previous research in this field.

### **Sample: Time 1**

#### **The Divorcing Families**

The Family Law Court of Australia has co-operated very generously in this research. Because of the confidentiality of its clients, letters were sent out by the Principal Court Registrar on behalf of the researcher to people as they made application for divorce over a 9-month period in 1982. The nature of the research was explained and the names of those who agreed to participate were passed on. The advantages of this method of recruitment are that access was gained to the whole range of divorcing families from the metropolitan registries

of Sydney and Parramatta and it was possible to specify geographical and other desired criteria.

As has been noted many studies of the impact of divorce on children have failed to record how long parents have been divorced, and have not discriminated between the divorce itself, and the more psychologically stressful event for children of the final separation. Under the Family Law Act (1975) at least 12 months must elapse between separation and dissolution. Pre-divorce separations of long duration were eliminated by specifying that subjects should not have been apart for longer than 30 months. All subjects were within weeks of the actual divorce, and the final separation had occurred, on average, eighteen months previously.

In order to use the control group to distinguish age-related from divorce-induced effects it was important to control for age. Subjects were in early adolescence (13 -16); one had had her seventeenth birthday, but the average age of the divorcing sample was 15.

The sample was restricted to people living within the boundaries of the greater metropolitan area of Sydney, the capital city of the State of New South Wales. This embraces the densely populated inner city, newer working-class areas in the outer Western suburbs, beach suburbs and the more wealthy harbour-side and Northern areas.

Although people were asked by official letter from the Court if they would take part in the research, participation was in fact voluntary. With any sample of this nature it is important to find out whether there are any hidden biases arising from systematic differences between those who take part and those who do not. Accurate description of the sample ensures that the results can be generalised appropriately. Failure to respond is a common problem with divorce research (Spanier, 1976). A Swedish study by Trost and Hultaker (1982) achieved a 50 per cent response rate only after sending out seven successive questionnaires over a 12-month period. In the present study the Court sent out only one letter to each applicant and the researcher had no access to names other than of those who consented. Letters went only to the person who filed the divorce application; this was not necessarily the parent with whom the adolescent lived. Forty-eight per cent of the 273 people contacted by the Court replied; of these 39 per cent agreed to participate and the remainder declined.

Some people contacted the researcher or the Court to explain their reasons for non-participation. These were varied and did not appear to indicate any bias towards higher family turbulence among those who did not take part (see below). The research design required personal interviews with each parent and also the adolescent. A number of parents were willing to take part themselves but either had no access to their children (who were living with the other spouse, or had moved from Sydney), or felt that their children had settled down well and were unwilling to risk disturbing them. Others felt it was too near the divorce and suggested we contact them again later. Some adolescents themselves did not wish to take part. In the shifting population of newly separated families a proportion may never have received the letter.

#### Were There Any Differences Between Participant and Non-Participant Families?

Court records are, of course, confidential to all but officers of the Court. The research psychologist of the Family Court, Sophy Bordow, kindly carried out an examination of the records of those to whom the Court sent letters, in order to see whether there were any systematic differences between those who agreed to participate and those who either refused or who failed to reply.

Information regarding occupation, education-level or income was not available for non-respondents. An estimate of social class position was made from area of residence categorised by means of 1976 Australian Bureau of Statistics census figures of average male income for Sydney municipalities (Poulsen and Spearritt, 1981). Those who failed to reply were more likely to live in the lower income areas of Sydney than were those people who made contact with us ( $X^2 = 10.68$ ; d.f. = 2;  $p < .01$ ). However, when participants in the study are compared with non-participants (i.e. non-respondents and refusers) there is no significant difference between the groups ( $X^2 = 2.44$ ; d.f. = 2;  $p = .12$ ).

Ethnicity of respondents and non-respondents was estimated by family name as no other information was available. There were rather more non-Anglo names among the non-respondents, but the difference was not significant ( $X^2 = 5.3$ ; d.f. = 2;  $p = .07$ ). Those who participated and those who refused are very similar ( $X^2 = .29$ ; d.f. = 2;  $p = .50$ ).

Taken together, these figures suggest that there is little difference between participants and refusers in social background, but that non-respondents are likely to belong to the lower income sectors of the community. This is consistent with the pattern of much other research in the social sciences, and means that caution must be exercised in generalising findings across the social spectrum. It should be noted, however, that over half of the sample have working-class occupations in comparison with many overseas studies with largely middle or upper middle class populations.

TABLE 3.1

Divorcing Population: Percentage of Each Response Category  
by Whether Applicant Has Custody of Adolescent

<u>Applicant's status</u>	<u>Acceptance</u>		<u>Refusal</u>		<u>No Reply</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
has custody	32	64	33	49	51	37	116	45
does not have custody	18	36	35	51	87	63	140	55
Total	50	100	68	100	138	100	256	100

Note: For 1 who accepted and 16 non-participants custody information was missing when this analysis was carried out.

Table 2.3 shows that participants in the study were significantly more likely to have their children living with them than were refusers or non-respondents ( $X^2 = 8.09$ ; d.f. = 2;  $p = .005$ ). It appears from this that divorce applicants whose children were living with the other partner may have experienced difficulty in initiating arrangements for the family to take part in interviews, particularly at a time close to the actual divorce.

These demographic explanations suggest that factors other than those bearing directly on psychological adjustment have influenced participation. However, because of the important link that has been found in past research between parental conflict and child adjustment, it was necessary to see whether the families who consented to take part in the study were systematically different from those who refused in this important area.

The interviews show that the sample includes divorces of all kinds ranging from relatively amicable decisions to part once children were past their early childhood, to cases of violence, incest and psychopathology. We did not know, however, whether the proportion

of more serious and conflictual cases was similar to that of the families who declined to take part.

A sub-group of these cases was examined by Bordow on behalf of the researcher in order to see whether the two groups had similar levels of conflict as defined by their involvement in court processes over and above their application for divorce. It was found that a somewhat higher proportion of participants in the study had engaged in defended disputes involving the Family Court during the 12 months after the divorce ( $X^2 = 3.8$ ; d.f. = 1;  $p = .05$ ). These cases typically involved property settlements: court wrangles over custody and access concerning adolescents are rare except where younger siblings are involved (Horwill and Bordow, 1983).

Differing ratios of disputes over property may reflect differences in socio-economic status, so the incidence of judicial restraining orders or injunctions was also examined. Injunctions restraining parties to the divorce from molestation and assault, access to the matrimonial home or property, or access to children may be seen as clear indicators of severity of conflict. The Court analysis revealed that 10 per cent of the sample had sought injunctions against their spouses, in comparison with 7 per cent of the subsample of those who declined to participate. These findings indicate that the research sample is not biased towards families that are unrepresentative in being less conflictual than average. On the contrary, rather more of these adolescents may have been exposed to family turbulence than those in the wider divorcing population.

The initial sample consisted of the first 40 divorcing families who satisfied research criteria. In three families interviews were carried out with parents, but adolescent information was insufficient to justify inclusion in the present sample. The final sample is presented in Table 3.2.



TABLE 3.2  
Composition of Participating Families

<u>Divorced group</u>	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>	<u>Total</u>
With mother	10	12	22
With father	8	3	11
Under same roof	1	3	4
Total	19	18	37
<u>Intact group</u>	22	19	41
<u>Sample Total</u>	41	37	78

As can be seen from Table 3.2, of the divorced sample, eleven teenagers were living with their fathers and 22 were with their mothers. One boy who saw his home base as his mother's house was actually living away from home. Four families were still living under the same roof although the parents were not co-habiting and they were deemed to be separated under the requirements of the Family Law Act. (In each of these the assumption emerged that the child would ultimately live with the mother.) For two boys and two girls the divorce was between a parent and a step-parent.

In 60 per cent of cases both custodial and non-custodial parents agreed to be interviewed. (The permission of the contact parent was asked before getting in touch with his or her ex-partner. In some cases - usually of violence or high conflict - mothers asked us not to contact the father.) To avoid artificial inflation of parents' measures and ensure the independence of each case, only one adolescent from each family was included.

#### The Intact Families

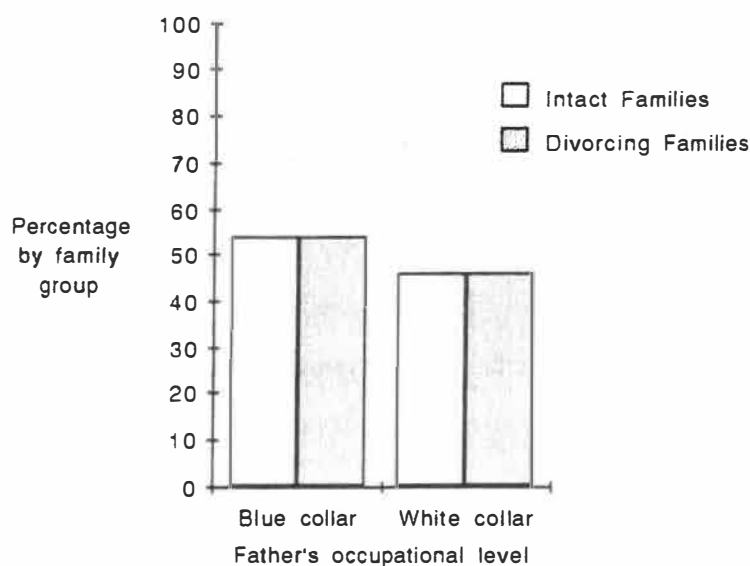
Intact families were recruited from 8 Sydney high schools chosen to represent a diversity of geographical and social environments. As with the Court sample, the New South Wales Department of Education specified that letters be sent from the school inviting participation. Forty-one families were randomly selected within the desired socio-economic frame from the 129 responses received. (See Appendix 1). While this group must be seen as a voluntary sample, great care was taken to investigate the psychometric and demographic characteristics of the families. Comparisons with published norms and with the

characteristics of the divorcing sample reveal the control group families to be representative on adjustment measures and comparable with the divorcing group in demographic background. Norm comparisons at Time 1 are presented and discussed in Appendix 3, and Time 2 comparisons appear in Appendix 5. Background variables are discussed below.

The timing of the research programme necessitated that the control group families be contacted and interviewed before all members of the divorcing sample had been procured. Since the socio-economic profile of the divorced group was not known when intact families were chosen it was decided to opt for 'middle Australia'. Fathers' occupations ranged from truck-driver to professor, and mothers included boutique-manageress, lecturer, waitress, and housewife, among many more. Merging the two upper (A and B) and the two lower (C and D) status categories of Congalton's (1969) classification of Australian occupations, the proportions of fathers' jobs included 46 per cent in the higher group, and 54 per cent in the lower one. The same proportions emerged from the divorced sample. The divorced group had slightly more A and C type occupations than the intact families but there were no significant differences with regard to socio-economic status in subsequent analyses.

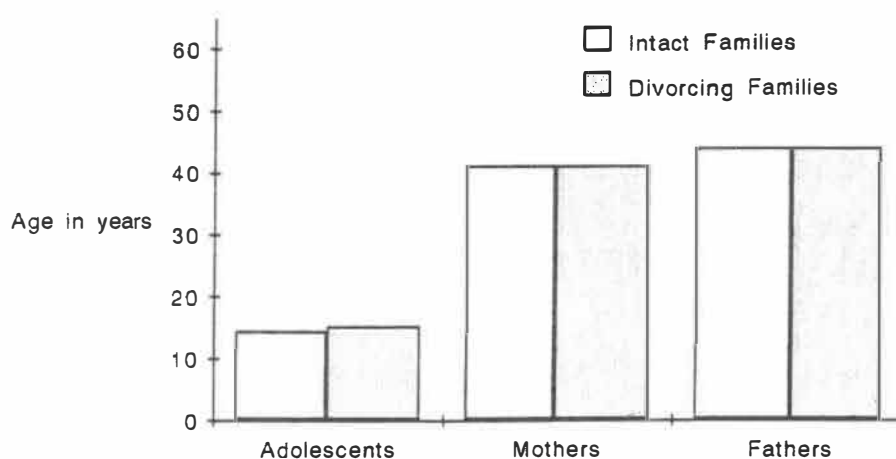
FIGURE 3.2

Father's occupational level (blue collar versus white collar) by family group



The mean birth-dates of each group were the same, but the timing of the research programme created a small but significant group difference in age at interview as the control group interviews were completed some months ahead of those of the divorcing families. The mean for intact-group adolescents was 14.34 compared with 15 for the divorcing group. Age was accordingly controlled (as previously noted) by its inclusion as a covariate in subsequent analyses.

FIGURE 3.3  
Mean ages of adolescents, mothers and fathers at time of interview  
by family group



In obtaining a sample with which to compare a research group it is essential that the control group itself is representative of the general population and especially that it is not less well adjusted than average. The intact families were tested against population norms on the standard measures and mean scores indicated normal adjustment among the adolescents with few deviations from subscale norms. Mothers' marital adjustment scores on Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) were similar to population norms and fathers reported higher rates of marital satisfaction than average. These marriages were seen as significantly more affectionate by both parents - on average - than those of the Australian couples studied by Antill and Cotton (1982). Details of these results are presented in Appendix 3 and the scales are discussed on pages 101 to 107 of the present chapter.

### Comparison of Divorced and Intact Families on Demographic Variables

It was important that the non-divorcing families should be adequately matched with the divorcing group so that legitimate comparisons could be made. On the other hand, overzealous matching may remove differences which are themselves intrinsic to the marital situation and also to the adjustment of the child. It would be unwise, for example, to match families on the basis of current family income, for divorce is frequently accompanied by income loss and this factor may be implicated in a child's poor adjustment (Desimone-Luis, et al., 1979). Bronfenbrenner's 'second and third order effects' (1979), may operate in the form of demographic variables whose association with divorce is not obvious, but which may affect children either directly or indirectly through their parents. For this reason, and also because of the size of the present sample, it was decided to match the groups loosely on the basis of father's occupation, and adolescent sex and age. A wide range of demographic variables was measured, and 66 one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were carried out to determine whether the groups differed with respect to any of these characteristics. These results are presented in Table 3.3.

TABLE 3.3

Comparisons of Intact and Divorcing Group Families on Demographic and  
Background Variables: Individual ANOVA F Values

Family characteristics

Length of time married	.70	First child still living at home	19.07***
Mother's age	.19	Age of second child	1.88
Father's age	.01	Sex of second child	.00
Adolescent's age	13.31** <sup>1</sup>	Second child still at home	9.12**
Number of children	.11	Age of third child	.07
Adol's ordinal position	.11	Sex of third child	.18
Mother's place of birth	1.14	Third child still at home	1.33
Father's place of birth	.74	Age of fourth child	.25
Mother's years in Aust.	.19	Sex of fourth child	1.12
Father's years in Aust.	.43	Fourth child at home	.02
Mother's education	7.47**	Age of fifth child	.17
Father's education	.19	Sex of fifth child	.43
Age of first child	1.11	Fifth child at home	3.00
Sex of first child	.06		

Employment

Father's work type	2.26	Mother's work training	1.40
Mother's work type	9.53**	Is mother employed?	2.94
Mother's last work	.16		

Income and living arrangements

Family income	15.96***	Others in same house	2.85
Mother's income	8.23**	Who else?	.15
Mother's income change	.24	Length of residence	5.06*
Amount, income change	1.25	Number of moves	.35
Number of dependents	24.32** <sup>1</sup>	Place moved to	1.55
Living arrangements	1.66	Change of schools	8.18**
Cost of accommodation	5.56*		

Religious affiliation

Adolescent's religion	.07	Mother's religion	7.90**
Adolescent's attendance	.25	Mother's attendance	.52
Importance to parent of child's religion	.04	Father's religion	8.86**
		Father's attendance	5.21*

Health

Adolescent's health	.47	Mother's hospitalisation	2.44
Mother's health	1.39	Father's health	1.09
Change in mother's hlth	6.40* <sup>1</sup>	Change in father's hlth	1.17
Mother's gynae. probs	.37	Father's medical probs	.03
Mother's medical probs	2.68	Father's surgical probs	.01
Mother's surgical probs	.56	Father's nervous probs	12.17***
Mother's nervous probs	5.06*	Father's hospitalisation	4.48*

(\* =  $p < .05$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ )

NOTE: 1 denotes variables which shows significant group differences AND are significantly correlated with adolescent adjustment variables. These are controlled by inclusion as covariates in subsequent MANOVA model reduction.

All other variables significantly discriminating between the groups are regarded as group descriptors.

The groups were examined for possible differences in the ages of the children and their parents, the number of children in the family, family living arrangements, social class, employment, economic situation, educational levels, religious affiliation and practice, country of birth, and the physical health of the teenager and his or her parents.

Significant differences between the groups were found on some variables (see Table 3.3), so correlations between these and each of the adjustment measures were carried out. Only three differentiating variables were found to be significantly related to adolescent adjustment at  $p < .05$ . These were: number of dependents, change in mother's health and adolescent age.

These variables were therefore controlled by fitting them as covariates in the subsequent between groups MANOVA reduction. None were found to influence outcomes, so all but age were dropped from later analyses. Age was retained because of its bearing on developmental issues although the difference between the means of the two groups was only nine months.

#### Divorced and Intact Families - Descriptive Characteristics

The two groups of families are very alike in many ways. A similar proportion of parents had been born in Australia. They had been married for about the same time (the mean for the intact group was 19 years, and 17 for the divorcing couples) and were similar in age. Their families were alike in size and age distributions, although in more of the divorced families the two oldest children had left home. (See Figures 3.4 and 3.5.)

FIGURE 3.4  
Percentage of families in each group by number of children

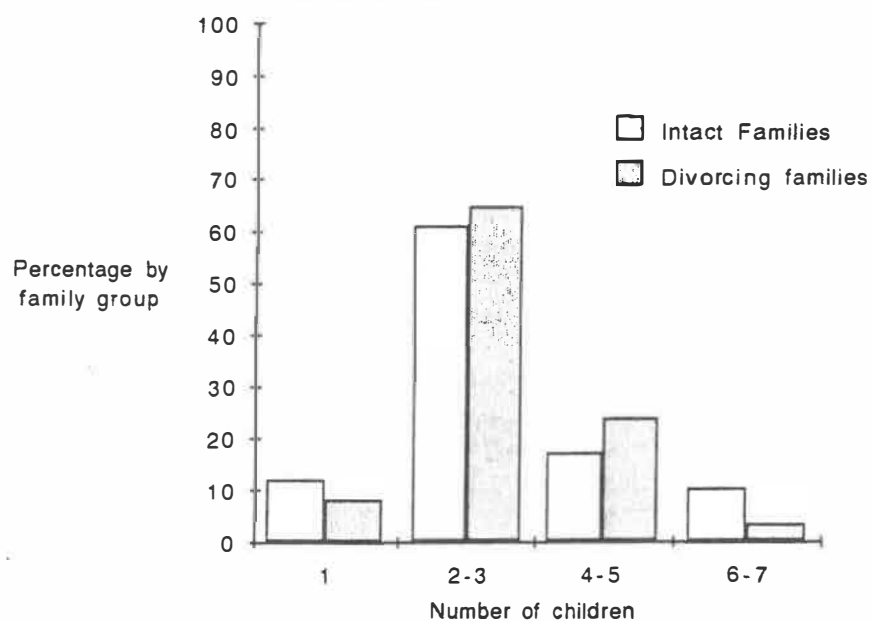
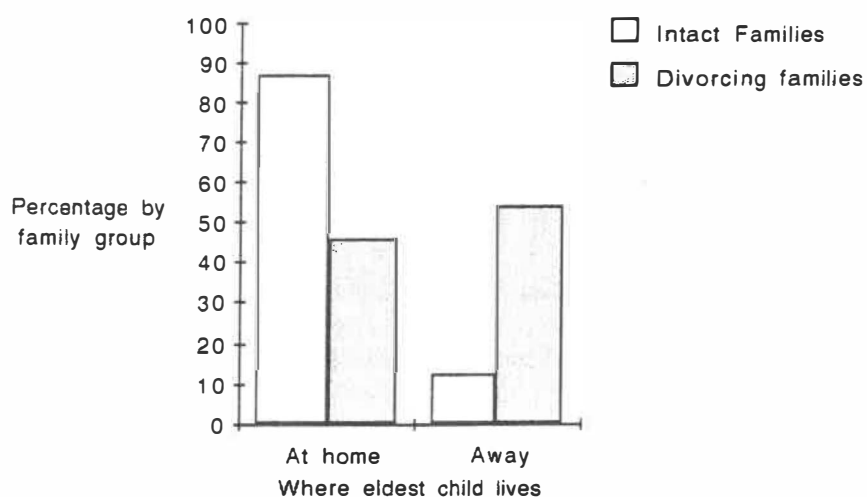


FIGURE 3.5  
Percentage of families in each group where eldest has left home



Fathers had a similar range of jobs, educational background and standard of physical health, although divorced group fathers reported more nervous problems. More divorced than intact family mothers reported that they felt healthier than they had twelve months earlier - probably indicating a higher level of stress closer to the time of separation than at the actual divorce. They tended to be better educated ( $p = .008$ ) and to have higher status jobs ( $p = .003$ ) than wives in intact families. (See Figures 3.6 and 3.7.)

FIGURE 3.6

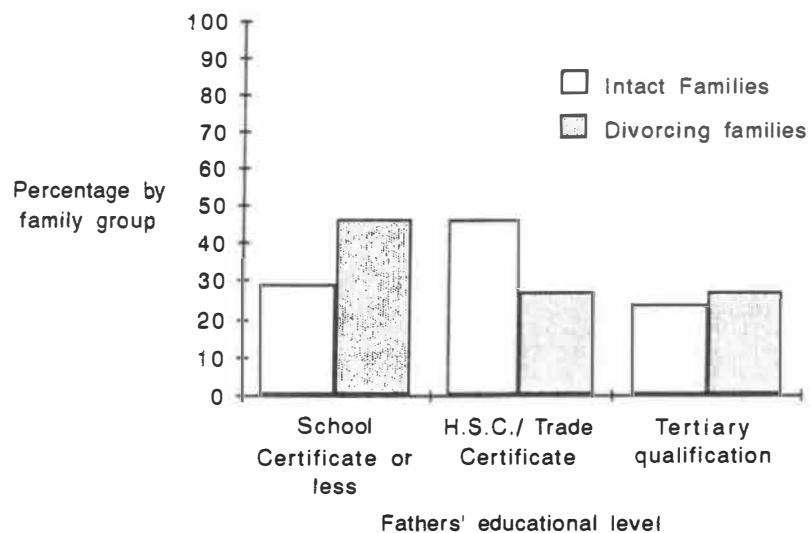
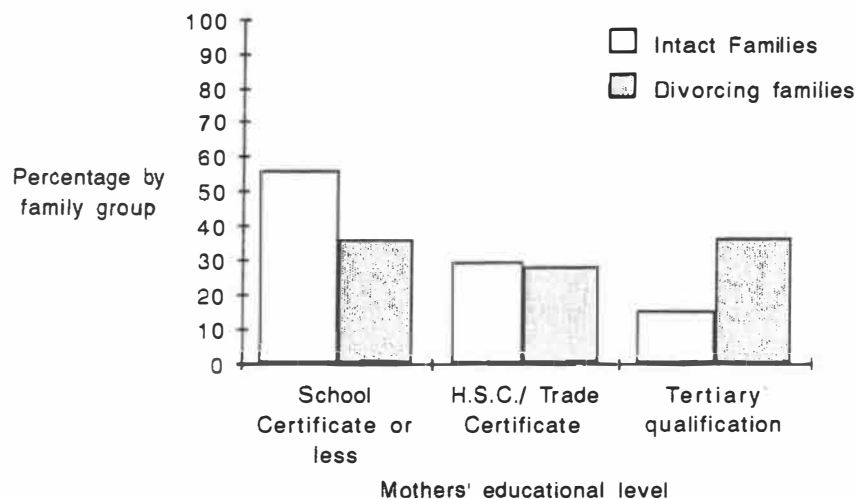
Father's education by family group

FIGURE 3.7

Mother's education by family group

This latter finding may reflect two processes. On the one hand middle-aged women who are able to support themselves adequately may be more likely to leave an unsatisfactory marriage than those who have less earning capacity. On the other hand, divorce may cause women to seek higher level jobs to enable them to be self-supporting.

Although there is no significant difference in church attendance among the mothers, fewer divorced fathers ( $p = .004$ ) and mothers ( $p = .006$ ) had any religious affiliation, compared with the intact group. There were no differences, however, in the adolescent's



church-going patterns, nor the proportion of parents who placed importance on their child's having had some kind of religious background.

There were a number of differences between the two groups of families concerning living and income arrangements. (Table 3.4.)

TABLE 3.4

Total Family Income: Intact Families and Custodial Mothers and Fathers  
by Income Category

	< \$9000		\$9000-14999		\$15000-20999		> \$21000		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Intact families	1	2.4	6	14.6	10	24.4	24	58.6	41
Custodial mothers	7	25.9	3	11.1	5	18.5	12	44.4	27
Custodial fathers	0	0	4	40	3	30	3	30	10

As might be expected, these figures indicate a higher proportion of divorced families in the lower income brackets ( $X^2 = 15.8$ ; d.f.= 6;  $p < .025$ ). However fewer family members depend on this income ( $p < .0001$ ). Property settlements had not been made in most instances, and "total family income" may not yet have become clearly established by the time of the interviews. There was anxiety about the outcome of property negotiations, especially where valuable assets were at stake. Many parents expressed concern about financial difficulties and there were some cases of considerable hardship.

Many mothers, and some fathers, were still living in the family home. High mortgage payments were a considerable burden in some families where the income might appear to be adequate, but where liquidity was restricted by heavy recurrent expenses. Accommodation costs were hard to translate into real income estimates in this relatively small sample.

A number of middle-aged women acknowledged that they had experienced unexpected satisfaction in re-entering the workforce when forced to do so by the break-down of their marriages. Despite some initial problems in finding jobs, they do not seem to have found the current unemployment situation an insuperable barrier. Some mothers had prepared themselves for re-entry to the work-force by upgrading their educational qualifications. Many found companionship and support, and a new sense of competence and self-esteem in

their jobs. There were some compensations, therefore, for the economic insecurity that many had experienced.

Financial uncertainty could be seen as a back-drop to the lives of many of the adolescents from divorcing families. Interview data indicates awareness of their changed situation and some anxiety about the future, however there are no significant correlations between adolescent adjustment scores and measures of family income or income change.

### Time 1 Summary

The sample analysis indicates success in reaching a wide cross-section of divorcing families. Checks indicate no evidence to suggest that this group over-represents the 'easy' divorce. The sample somewhat under-represents the lowest income groups, although slightly more than half the fathers have working-class occupations. The divorcing families are strikingly similar to the non-divorcing families with respect to a range of demographic variables and both groups were enlisted from non-clinical, broadly based populations. Consent to participate depended upon the willingness of the adolescent and at least one parent to be interviewed. This may have affected the composition of the sample to some degree, but has enabled finer examination of family processes and adolescent adjustment than would have been possible with one source of family information. The  $n$  necessarily varies in the analyses reported below because of some missing data.

### **Sample : Time 2**

In 1985 as many families as possible were re-contacted and adolescents were asked to participate in a further round of interviews. Sixty-four adolescents consented, yielding a response rate of 82 per cent of the original sample. Table 3.5 shows the retention composition of the 1985 sample .

TABLE 3.5

Sample Retention: Time 2. Sex by Family Group

<u>Family group</u>	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>	<u>Total</u>
Intact	21	15	36
Divorced	14	14	28
Total	35	29	64

To ascertain whether there are any systematic differences between those who remain in the study and those who dropped out, comparisons were made between the 1982 and 1985 samples on Time 1 standard measures (discussed below) and other selected variables. There are no significant differences according to retention by sex, age or family income, Offer Self-Image scores (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977a), Parent Bonding Scales (Parker, Tupling and Brown, 1979) or Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire totals (Scheier and Cattell, 1961) for the family groups separately, nor by family structure for the sample as a whole ( $F = .5$ ; d.f. = 7, 57;  $p = .82$ ).

While in 1982 a significant age difference between family groups emerged because of the timing of the interviewing, this was no longer the case in 1985, where Intact and Divorced group subjects were interviewed simultaneously.

Since the earlier study changes had taken place in the composition of some of the families. One divorcing couple had buried their differences and were happily remarried, declining to participate a second time. Two of the previously intact families had separated, only one of whom remained in the sample. Nine of the divorced group had married again (eight fathers and one mother), while others were living in stable de facto relationships. Most of the adolescents were still living at home, or saw it as their base during tertiary vacations; five had left home, three of whom remained in the sample. All those whose divorcing parents were previously still living under the same roof were now with one parent only. Seven adolescents had changed custodial parent since the last interview, although some had subsequently returned to the original arrangement. (The flexible nature of these custodial arrangements illustrates the virtue of not over-matching the sample initially.

Working out satisfactory custodial relationships may best be seen as part of the process of family restructuring.)

In the present analysis a boy whose parents separated after Time 1 is included in the Divorced group, and one extra case is added to this sample to enhance the N. This is a girl who was interviewed as well as her brother at her mother's request at Time 1, but was not included at that time to ensure independence of parental data. Since parental data is not available for Time 2, it was deemed legitimate to include this case. (The brother retains his father's surname and lives independently while the sister has adopted her mother's maiden name and lives with her.) The final sample consists of adolescents from 35 intact and 30 divorced families: Table 3.6 indicates sex distribution and living arrangements at Time 2.

TABLE 3.6

Final Sample: Time 2.

Family Structure by Sex and Living Arrangements.

	<u>Living arrangement of adolescent</u>	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Divorced</u> <u>Group</u>	With mother	9	12	21
	With father	4	2	6
	Independently	2	1	3
	Total	15	15	30
<u>Intact</u> <u>Group</u>	With both	20	15	35
	Sample Total	35	30	65

No significant differences were found between the types of occupation of the parents in each group, nor between the employment patterns of adolescents. Thirty-nine per cent were now working full-time, 31 per cent had part-time jobs and the others were not working. Job types were similar in both groups and fell into the lower S.E.S. categories, presumably because those with higher aspirations were still in the educational system. Rather more of the Intact group were still at school, but the difference was not significant ( $X^2 = .9$ ; d.f. = 1;  $p = .4$ ).

### Time 2 Summary

Attenuation of the sample is always a problem in longitudinal research, however the retention rate in the present study is satisfactory, and checks have not revealed any systematic differences between those that remained and those that dropped out. Comparisons between Divorced and Control groups on selected variables reveal no anomalies.

## **Research Design: Time 1**

### Interviews

In order to incorporate both the qualitative strengths of a case-history approach and also the rigour of standard measurement, semi-structured interview-schedules were designed for parents and adolescents. The standard measures are described below.

The interviews provide demographic information and record many facets of family life. Parents from both family groups were asked about their view of family relationships including conflict, family alliances, discipline, rules and family activities. They were asked to comment on their teenager's interests, school and social adjustment and personal characteristics. They also told us about their own sources of social support and methods of coping with stress. Divorcing parents were asked about the circumstances of the divorce and their view of its impact on their adolescent. Parents were encouraged to tell us in their own way what they felt was needed in the way of support and facilities for adolescents both in intact and separated families.

In the present work parental interview data is limited to that concerning demographic information and adolescent adjustment: scores on adult adjustment and marital relationship scales are also included.

Adolescents were seen separately by an interviewer who had not talked with either parent so that their perceptions could be recorded without prior expectations, and the teenagers themselves could see their participation as independent of their parents. It was felt that it was very important to gain adolescents' views as accurately as possible as prior research (Emery,1982; Kurdek and Berg,1983,1987; Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky,1981)

indicates that parents' perceptions of their children's divorce adjustment is not a reliable source. Parents' accounts may be coloured by their own depression or anger or by unconscious denial of negative reactions.

The adolescents' interview seeks to build up a picture of their world of family relationships, friends, school and leisure activities, problems, opinions, and hopes for the future. Divorced group adolescents describe their reaction to and experience of the divorce. This includes their emotional reactions, acceptance, divorce-related changes in relationships with parents, response to changes in living arrangements, satisfaction with custody and access arrangements, and relationships with their parents' new partners and their children. They are also asked what advice they would give to other parents and teenagers in similar circumstances. (Only interview material relevant to the thesis is reported here.)

Trained male and female psychology graduates (two males and six females) assisted the researcher in carrying out the interviews which took place in people's homes except where subjects preferred to visit Macquarie University. Interviewers were allocated largely on a geographical basis, partly for reasons of compatibility and partly because of the long travelling times involved.

Adult interviews lasted two to three hours, and adolescents usually talked for about one and a half hours each. Divorced subjects (both adults and adolescents) often spoke for considerably longer. In intact families one parent would fill out tests while the other spoke to the interviewer about the more sensitive aspects of family relations. Parents alternated in this section of the interview, but were otherwise interviewed together. Divorced parents were interviewed separately.

The experience of visiting these families in their homes and talking with them in a relaxed and informal way provided us with a rare opportunity to gain insight into the lives of both parents and adolescents. Among the divorced families, especially, much was discussed over a late-night cup of tea after the official interview was ended.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Because of their length, the interview schedules are not included in this volume but are available from the author on request. Interview items on which analyses are based are reported in full in the text or in appendices as noted.

### Standard Measures (Adolescent)

Measures were chosen to provide a well-rounded picture of the adolescent. The standard measures allow comparison of adolescent adjustment across the two family groups, and also the assessment of results in the light of population norms. In this way a baseline can be obtained from which to evaluate the level of adjustment of the adolescents from divorcing families.

Adolescent measures include the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977a, 1981b), and the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ) (Scheier and Cattell, 1961) which together provide information about normal patterns of development and also about levels of anxiety and depression. These measures provide the basic outcome variables in the analyses reported below. To investigate family processes, and in particular the quality of parent-child relationships as perceived by adolescents, the Parent Bonding Inventory (PBI), was chosen (Parker, Tupling and Brown, 1979; Parker, 1983).

Parent measures include the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), the NSQ, and a psychiatric symptom test, the Langner Twenty-two Item Screening Scale (Langner, 1962).

The standard measures are described in greater detail below. Validity and reliability information is included in Appendix 2 and means and standard deviations by divorced and intact family structure with norm comparisons are presented in Appendix 3.

#### The Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ)

The Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977a, 1981b) was selected as the main adjustment measure for adolescents. This measure of self-concept was developed by Daniel Offer of the University of Chicago and his colleagues in 1962 and has been used widely in research with normal and disturbed adolescents. Cross-cultural studies have also been carried out, comparing teenage groups from Ireland, Israel, the United States of America and Australia (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977a,b, 1981a,b). The cross-cultural work is continuing and a monograph presenting results for 10 countries on a revised international version of the questionnaire has just appeared (Offer, Ostrov and Howard,

1988)<sup>1</sup>. This study uses the original version and comparisons between the present sample and Australian norms are presented in Appendix Tables A.3.1. and A.3.2 for Time 1 and Appendix Tables 5.1 and 5.2 for Time 2..

As we have already seen, Offer sees normal adolescent development as a multi-dimensional process. A child may be well-adjusted in one area while he or she functions less well in another. The OSIQ allows the plotting of this variability. It measures the feelings and attitudes that teenagers have about themselves in eleven different areas of functioning. These are grouped under five main aspects of the self.

The Psychological Self. This aspect of the self is measured by three scales: Impulse Control measures the adolescent's ability to cope with his or her impulses - to ward off internal and external pressures; Emotional Tone assesses the person's emotional stability; Body and Self-Image examines the extent to which the youngster feels at ease with his or her body and the bodily changes occurring at this time.

The Social Self. The Social Relationships scale explores the adolescent's relationships with other people and his or her friendship patterns. Morals measures the development of conscience, responsibility and concern for others. Vocational and Educational Goals indicates the degree to which the adolescent is coping with the task of orienting him- or herself - towards the future.

The Sexual Self. The Sexual Attitudes scale examines the adolescent's feelings, attitudes and behaviour towards the opposite sex, and openness towards his or her own sexuality.

The Familial Self. The Family Relationships scale measures relationships between the adolescent and his or her parents, and the emotional atmosphere within the home.

The Coping Self. Mastery of the External World indicates how well the adolescent can deal with his or her environment. Psychopathology picks up overt psychopathological symptoms. Superior Adjustment measures how well the adolescent copes with him - or herself, with other people, and with the world. It can be seen as a measure of ego strength or coping ability.

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<sup>1</sup> This work has now been published in America but has not been sighted by the present author.



As well as the eleven sub-scales, a Total score can be derived. Offer et al describe this as measuring psychological well-being and adjustment. The questionnaire consists of 130 statements which subjects rate on a six-point scale from “describes me very well” to “does not describe me at all”. High scores represent poor functioning.

Cross-cultural studies have shown some differences but by and large there is remarkable consistency across adolescents from the four different countries compared so far (Offer, et al. 1977a,b, 1981a,b). Australian norms, based on a 1969 sample of 1350 Tasmanian 13 to 15 year-olds, have been adopted for the present study. The OSIQ is used in Australia for both clinical and research purposes, and is regarded as a valuable instrument for use with adolescents. The main appeal of the OSIQ is its ability to differentiate between dimensions of adjustment which are especially relevant at adolescence, thus making it a flexible and thorough measure. In the present analyses raw scores rather than standard scores have been used with this and other measures for consistency's sake.

#### The Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ)

The Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire is one of the well-known instruments developed for the Institute for Personality and Ability Testing by Scheier and Cattell (1961). It is brief, consisting of 40 statements answered on a three-point scale, and is suitable for use with both adults and adolescents from the age of 13 onwards. High scores indicate poor adjustment.

The NSQ measures neurotic tendency. It contains scales which examine four aspects of functioning found by empirical means to be independent of each other. These are sensitivity, depression, submissiveness and anxiety. It also provides a total neuroticism score. The scale is designed to indicate aspects of adjustment among normal people, as well as to identify those with significant neurotic disturbance. For the present purposes the Depression and Anxiety scales are of most interest. Raw scores are used rather than sex-corrected sten scores. Norm comparisons are presented in Appendix Tables A3.3 and A3.4 for Time 1 and Tables A5.3 and A5.4 for Time 2.

#### The Parent Bonding Inventory (PBI)

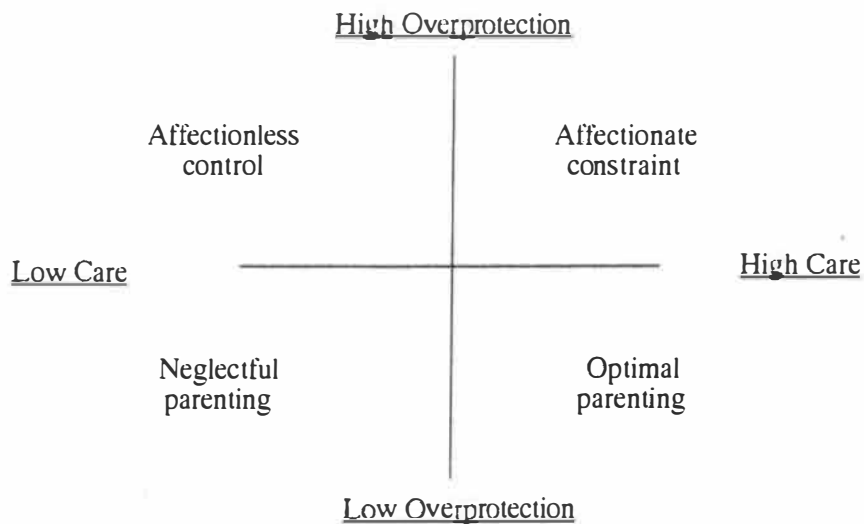
The Parent Bonding Inventory is an Australian measure developed by Parker, Tupling and Brown (1979) as a tool for investigating psychiatric patients' retrospective reports of

their relationships with their parents, and subsequently tested on both U.K and Australian samples. Parker (1979) found a strong association on this measure between neurotic depression in adults and reports of their parents as having been more overprotective and less caring than parents of normal controls. Comparisons between Parker's adult Australian norms and the present sample are presented in Appendix Tables A3.5 for Time 1 and A5.5 for Time 2.

The PBI consists of twenty-five statements rated by the subject on a four-point scale from 'very like' to 'very unlike' his/her mother or father. The items are counter-balanced and make up two scales measuring Care and Overprotection. The care scale consists of items tapping warmth, understanding and acceptance ( e.g. "Speaks to me with a warm and friendly voice", "Appears to understand my worries and problems", " Makes me feel I'm (not) wanted".) The overprotection scale includes items measuring control, intrusiveness and encouragement of dependence (e.g. "Tries to control everything I do", "Invades my privacy", "Feels I cannot look after myself unless he/she is around", "Does not want me to grow up".) Parker now calls this scale Protection, but the earlier terminology has been retained in this thesis as it seems to reflect more accurately the nature of the items, and the focus of the scale's present use.

The two scales can be intersected at means derived from normative studies, providing quadrants representing four parenting styles, as depicted in Figure 3.8. These are designated by Parker as follows: Optimal Parenting (high care and low overprotection), Affectionate Constraint (high care and high overprotection), Affectionless Control (low care and high overprotection), and Neglectful Parenting (low scores on both scales).

FIGURE 3.8  
Parent Bonding Inventory: Parenting Quadrants.



Note: The axes are bisected at normative means by sex of parent: mother care = 27, mother overprotection = 13.5; father care = 24, father overprotection = 12.5.)

Source: After Parker, Tupling and Brown, 1979.

The means adopted are derived from studies of adults retrospectively assessing relationships with parents as they recall them up to the age of 16 (Parker et al, 1979). Little information on adolescents currently rating parents is available, but there are indications that the sample adolescents (especially girls) may give somewhat higher care and lower overprotection scores than those of adult norms (see Appendix Table A3.5). See Appendix 2 for validity and reliability information.

In the present study the PBI is used to obtain adolescent perceptions of their current - rather than retrospective - relationship with parents. The scales are examined independently and the Optimal Parenting quadrant, versus all others is examined. The emphasis on optimal parenting arises from interest in Rutter's (1971) finding that a good relationship with at least one parent may act as a buffer in time of family crisis.

The measure was chosen because the scales tap aspects of parent-child relationships which are particularly relevant to adolescence. Much evidence supports the view that warmth and acceptance are key ingredients for psychological health and that rejection or neglect can cripple self-esteem. However a highly caring relationship can also be a binding one, preventing independent learning experiences that foster self-confidence. Since

differentiation from parents is a central task of adolescence it is important that both these dimensions are included. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) have pointed out that where a parent clings to an adolescent following divorce, or uses him or her as an emotional substitute, psychological development may be impeded. However it is not only in divorced families that such situations may arise, and the present study examines the nature of parent-child relationships in both family groups.

### Standard Measures (Parents)

#### The Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) was filled in by parents. It is a carefully designed and well-tested measure for assessing the quality of marital relationships. It consists of 32 items which tap four main aspects of a relationship, and also provide a total adjustment score. The subscales examine Satisfaction, Cohesion, Consensus, and Affection. This scale has been widely used overseas, and also in Australian studies. Australian norm comparisons appear in Appendix Table A.3.7.

The scale is used here to examine the compatibility of parents in the intact families, comparing them with Australian norms in order to establish their suitability as a control group. It is also used to examine the relationship between adolescent self-image and parents' reports of their marital relationship.

#### Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire

This scale (discussed above) was administered to parents as well as adolescents to measure psychological adjustment. Norm comparisons appear in Appendix Tables A3.8 and A3.9.

#### Langner 22-Item Screening Test

This brief psychiatric screening test (Langner, 1962) was also used to measure parents' psychological adjustment. Developed to identify people suffering from mild or more serious psychiatric disorders, a cutting point of four symptoms is regarded by Langner

as identifying 84.4 per cent of the incapacitated members of a population. A more stringent level of seven symptoms eliminates most who are mildly affected, but identifies over half of the seriously affected. This measure has been used in Australia (Hennessy, Bruen and Cullen, 1973), and is included as an adjunct to the NSQ for detecting moderate to severe parental psychopathology. Norm comparisons are presented in Appendix Table A3.10.

### Other Measures Used

#### Parents' Appraisal Scale

The main focus of this research is on the adolescents' experience and their view of family relations. Use of self-report outcome measures, as outlined above, is compatible with this largely phenomenological approach, especially as considerable evidence suggests that appraisal by teachers and parents of the adjustment of children of divorce may be unreliable (Ball, Newman and Scheurin, 1984; Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky, 1981; Kurdek and Berg, 1987; Santrock and Tracy, 1978). It was, however, deemed desirable to include one independent measure as a check on the direction of the main results, and the Parents' Appraisal Scale was developed for this purpose.

Twenty-one questions were included in the parents' interview schedule designed to examine their view of adolescent functioning, with particular emphasis on maturity and responsibility. These were phrased to provide both positive and negative keying and answered on a four-point scale. Items detracting from the reliability of the total scale were successively eliminated and the remaining items subjected to a principal component analysis in order to develop subscales. The resulting scales were in turn refined by reliability analysis, yielding a total scale of 16 items. Subsequent VARIMAX and OBLIMIN procedures yielded the same result, indicating that the subscales are orthogonal. Table 3.7 presents the resulting factors; only items with a weight of .5 or more are included.

TABLE 3.7

Factor Analysis of Items Measuring Parental Appraisal  
of Adolescent Functioning.

<u>Item</u>	<u>F1</u>	<u>F2</u>	<u>F3</u>	<u>F4</u>	<u>F5</u>	<u>F6</u>
Can't concentrate for long*	.78					
Lacks enterprise and initiative*	.74					
Is easily led by others*	.61					
Has a go at doing difficult things		.63				
Makes a fuss when extra jobs to do*		.54				
Can be relied on		.76				
Does what is needed without being told		.78				
Is understanding of parents' worries			.84			
Cares about other people's feelings			.87			
Accepts life in a realistic way				.64		
Can't be trusted to behave responsibly*				.76		
Acts before thinking, is impulsive*				.55		
Is sulky if unable to have own way*					.76	
Spends time with friends not family*					.76	
Wants parents to make up his/her mind*						.78
Finds it hard to make decisions*						.66
Eigen value	4.3	2.1	1.6	1.3	1.1	1.1
% Variance explained	26.7	13.4	9.7	8.0	6.6	6.4
% Variance explained (cumulative)	26.7	40.1	49.1	57.7	64.3	70.6

\*Item reversed to provide consistent keying.

The following scales are based on these factors:

(1) Self-reliant , (Cronbach's alpha = .70); (2) Dependable , (alpha = .67); (3) Empathic , (alpha = .76); (4) Responsible , ( alpha = .70); (5) Co-operative , (alpha = .58); (6) Decisive , (alpha = .50). The total scale has a reliability of alpha = .71. While the number of items per scale is low, suggesting that the total score is the best measure to use, the existence of these identifiable components aids interpretation of results.

Validity. Total scale scores are significantly related to two independent interview questions concerning parents' views on the child's level of co-operation (  $t = 3.1$ ;  $p = .003$ ) and whether parents see the child as "easy" or "difficult" ( $t = 3.0$ ;  $p = .004$ ). Construct

validity is supported by moderate correlation between OSIQ total and Appraisal ( $r = .36$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Although the domains covered by the two instruments are not identical, and each has a different class of respondent, they appear to measure overlapping aspects of adolescent adjustment. Correlation of the subscales with the OSIQ scales and Total indicates patterns of association, of which those with Superior Adjustment, Family Relations and OSIQ total are the strongest (see Appendix 4, Table A4.1.).

The Parental Appraisal Scale is used in the initial Between Group analyses at Time 1 in order to provide an alternative, independently derived estimate of adolescent adjustment. A table of means and standard deviations by sex and family group is presented in Appendix 4, Table A4.2.

#### Divorce Response Measures

Details of scales investigating adolescent divorce response are presented in the Results sections (Chapters 4 and 5), as their development is more conveniently discussed in this context.

### **Research Design: Time 2**

#### Interviews

In 1985 semi-structured interviews were carried out as before with adolescents in their homes. The same interviewers were used in as many cases as possible; where this was not practicable a trained interviewer was given background information about the family circumstances at Time 1, but not about measurement scores.

Many of the questions asked at Time 1 were incorporated in the second interview in order to permit comparison. These include questions concerning divorce response, social support, levels of family happiness and conflict at both times, adolescent problems, relationships with parents, brushes with the law and relationships with friends. New information concerned changes occurring since Time 1, relations with step families, and rather more information about attitudes to marriage and divorce than was gathered previously. Open-ended sections allowing for free-response were also included, as before.

## Standard Measures

### Tests Previously Used

The standard measures used for adolescents at Time 1 were repeated. These are the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire, the depression and anxiety Scales of the Neuroticism Questionnaire and the Parent Bonding Scales. (Descriptive statistics and norm comparisons for Time 2 are presented in Appendix 5.)

### Erikson Psychosocial Inventory Scale

In addition a subscale measuring Readiness for Intimacy from the Erikson Psychosocial Inventory Scale (EPSI) was included. This instrument was developed in Melbourne, by Rosenthal, Gurney and Moore (1981) in order to operationalise and test Erikson's stage theory of psychosocial development. The divorce literature is somewhat contradictory about the effect of divorce on adolescent psychosexual development (see Chapter 2). Some writers cite evidence of greater sexual activity at an earlier age while others describe anxiety about entering into intimate relationships. These two issues are in fact separable, since one concerns sexual behaviour per se and the other addresses the capacity for commitment and a mature level of interpersonal intimacy. It was of interest, therefore, to see whether differences existed between adolescents from the two family groups on this measure.

Although this scale is a comparatively recent one lacking the exposure to multiple testing of better-established instruments, the relevance of its content and its use of an Australian adolescent sample to provide norms, made it an attractive choice for use in the follow-up study with 16 to 19-year-olds. Information on validity and reliability is given in Appendix 2, and means and standard deviations are presented in Appendix 5, Table 5.7.

## **Summary**

The emphasis in this thesis is on the adolescents' experience of their parents' divorce. Consonant with the theoretical framework adopted, a view derived from their own perceptions of the family, the changes that have occurred in their lives, their emotional response, and their assessment and acceptance of the divorce, is presented.



The standard outcome measures chosen are consistent with this approach in that they are derived from self-report tests. We believe with Offer et al., (1981, page 31) that "the psychological sensitivity of the adolescent is sufficiently acute to provide valid self-description". In addition, these instruments have been well-validated in studies with normal and disturbed populations which have shown that the subscales embedded in them are sensitive to differences in psychological adjustment established by independent means.

Parent data supplement those of adolescents, providing demographic information and an independent measure of adolescent functioning at Time 1, as well as measures of parental adjustment and marital satisfaction.

The aims of the study are to examine the relationship between family processes and adolescent adjustment over time among divorcing and non-divorcing families, and to identify factors present at Time 1 which predict adjustment at Time 2.

The results of statistical analyses are reported in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Selected case histories are then presented. These are linked to the analyses by reference to scores on standard measures. By seeing adolescents in the context of their families it is hoped to gain insight into personal aspects of the experience of divorce and to examine the influence in individual lives of the factors identified as predictors.

Specific hypotheses are presented below.

## **Hypotheses**

### Time 1 Analyses

Hypothesis 1. There will be no significant differences in adolescent adjustment scores according to intact or divorced family structure.

Hypothesis 2. Adolescent adjustment will be associated with level of family happiness.

Hypothesis 3. Adolescent adjustment will be associated with level of family conflict.

Hypothesis 4. Adolescent adjustment will be related to levels of parental psychological health.

Hypothesis 5. Adolescent adjustment will be associated with the perceived quality of relationships between adolescent and parents.

Hypothesis 6. Adolescent adjustment will be related to the perception of at least one parent as highly caring and low in overprotection.

Hypothesis 7. Adolescent adjustment in divorcing families will be related to the quality of the relationship with the custodial parent, but not to the sex of the parent or of the adolescent.

Hypothesis 8. Adolescent adjustment in divorcing families will be associated with the availability of an understanding confidante.

Hypothesis 9. Adolescent adjustment in divorcing families will be associated with the way in which the divorce is experienced and perceived, specifically through feelings, acceptance and perception of change in family conflict.

Hypothesis 10. Adolescent adjustment in divorcing families will be related to their global divorce response.

Hypothesis 11. No differences according to sex or age are predicted for the above comparisons.

## Time 2 Analyses

Hypothesis 12. There will be no significant differences in adolescent adjustment scores according to intact or divorced family structure, at Time 2.

Hypothesis 13. Adolescents from divorced families will be more ready for intimate heterosexual relationships than those from intact families.

Hypothesis 14. Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 will be associated with level of current family happiness.

Hypothesis 15. Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 will be associated with level of current family conflict.

Hypothesis 16. Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 will be associated with perceived quality of relationships between adolescent and parents.

Hypothesis 17. Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 will be related to the perception of at least one parent as highly caring and low in overprotection.

Hypothesis 18. Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 will be related to the availability of an understanding confidante.

Hypothesis 19. Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 in divorced families will be related to the quality of the relationship with the custodial parent, but not to the sex of the parent or of the adolescent.

Hypothesis 20. Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 in divorced families will be associated with the way in which the divorce is experienced and perceived, specifically through current feelings, acceptance and perception of change in family conflict.

Hypothesis 21. Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 in divorced families will be related to their global divorce response.

Hypothesis 22. No differences according to sex or age at Time 2 are predicted for the above comparisons.

#### Time 2 Adjustment Predicted From Time 1 Measures

Hypothesis 23. Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 will be associated with Time 1 base-line adjustment scores and family process variables.

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## CHAPTER 4

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### RESULTS OF ANALYSES: TIME 1

In the Introduction it is shown that despite some inconsistency among studies comparing the adjustment of adolescents from intact and separated families, family structure in itself does not appear to predict adjustment for the majority of young people. Clinical studies indicate that some have greater vulnerability, and that in these cases divorce may act as an added stressor, but other evidence shows that living in a conflictual intact family is also highly stressful. There are strong indications that psychological health cannot be attributed solely to divorced or intact family structure, but that processes within the family play a critical part. The present thesis, therefore, seeks to throw light on the nature of these family processes, and to find ways of predicting long-term adjustment so that adolescents who may be at risk - both in divorcing and in intact families - may be identified and helped. The analyses reported below examine variables associated with adjustment at Time 1. Subsequent chapters present results for Time 2, and then examine links between Time 1 and Time 2 data in order to develop a predictive model.

The first step is a cross-sectional examination of data from the first round of interviews. A series of analyses is undertaken, asking the following questions: 1. Are there any significant differences in psychological adjustment between the adolescents from intact and divorcing families? 2. What factors are associated with adolescent adjustment in both groups of families? 3. Are any specific factors associated with adjustment among the divorcing families? 4. To what extent do the age or sex of the adolescent affect these factors? 5. What model can be offered to explain the maximum variance in adjustment scores?

The results of these analyses are presented below. A specific hypothesis is stated for each step, and a brief comment on each set of results follows. A general discussion is presented at the end of each section. A significance level of  $\alpha = .05$  is adopted. Where multiple comparisons are made (as in inspecting the univariate relationships in a multiple analysis of variance) a more rigorous significance level is adopted to guard against the

possibility of results reaching significance by chance. In this we follow the test procedure of Bonferroni (Miller, 1966), where the level adopted is determined by the number of comparisons made and the overall family error rate. Multiple comparisons failing to satisfy this criterion but reaching the  $p = .05$  level are reported as trends only.

### **Between Group Analysis: Time 1**

Hypothesis 1. There will be no significant differences in adolescent adjustment scores according to intact or divorced family structure.

Using adolescent measures of adjustment - the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977) total scores and the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (Scheier and Cattell, 1961) anxiety and depression scales - as outcome measures and with age as a covariate, a MANOVA was carried out examining family structure (intact or separated) and sex. There are no significant differences between any of these variables. While a hypothesis stated in the negative is incapable of proof, it is of interest that the association between family structure and adolescent adjustment has a significance level close to unity ( $F = .07$ ; d.f. = 3,67;  $p = .98$ ), indicating little support for anything but the null hypothesis. These results are illustrated in Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3.

(Note that except where indicated all outcome measures are keyed so that low scores indicate better adjustment.)

FIGURE 4.1

Time 1 mean total Offer Self-Image scores by sex and family group

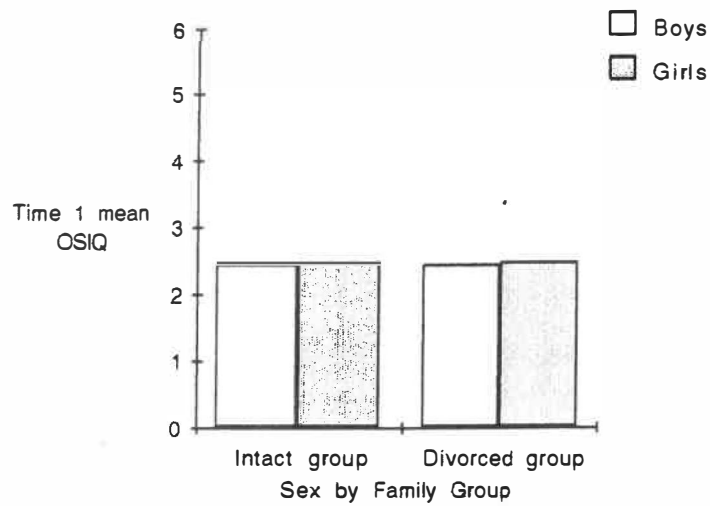
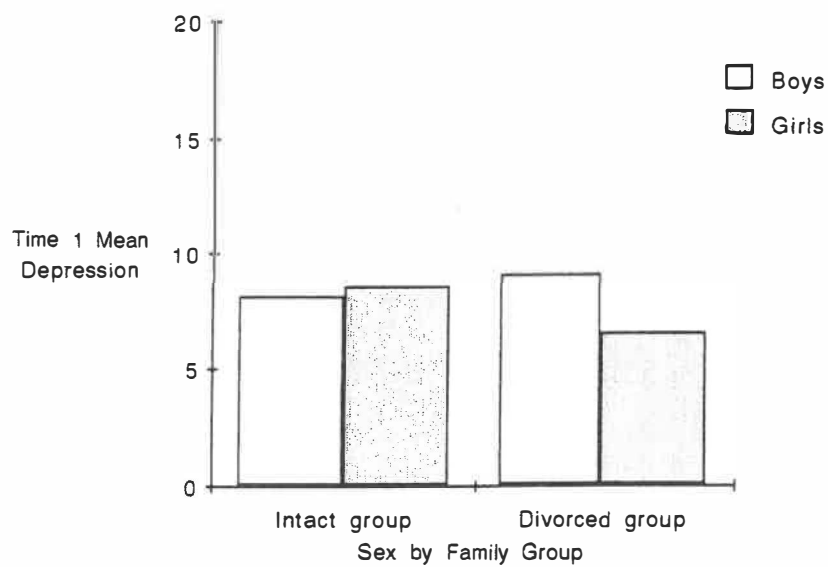


FIGURE 4.2

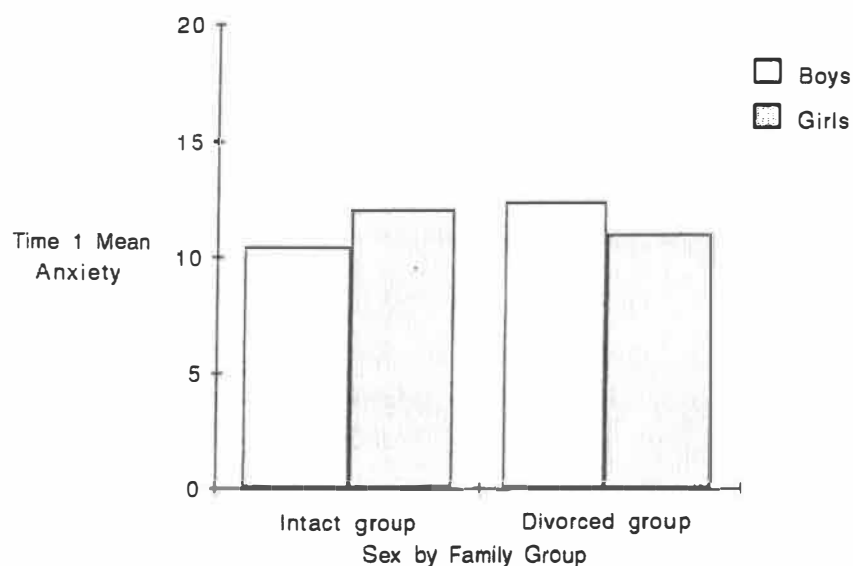
Time 1 Mean Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire Depression Subscale by sex and family group



Note: lower scores indicate better adjustment.

FIGURE 4.3

Time 1 Mean Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire Anxiety Subscale  
by sex and family group



Note: Lower scores indicate better adjustment

This result gives weight to the contention that family structure of itself does not predict global adolescent self-image, anxiety or depression. However it is also of interest to know whether any aspects of adjustment specific to adolescent development are differentially affected by divorce. A further MANOVA was therefore carried out, with the same covariate and predictors, but using the eleven Offer Self-Image subscales as outcome variables. Again no marital status nor marital status by sex effects are found. However this time a significant main effect for sex emerges ( $F = 2.1$ ; d.f. = 11, 59;  $p = .03$ ). Univariate trends show that the result comes largely from the morals ( $F = 4.86$ ; d.f. = 1, 69;  $p = .03$ ) and sexual attitudes scales ( $F = 4.2$ ; d.f. = 1, 69;  $p = .045$ ), with girls scoring better on the former, but less well on the latter.

A third analysis was then carried out, with the same predictors and covariate, but using an independently derived measure of adolescent adjustment. This is the Parents' Appraisal Scale<sup>1</sup>, a measure of adolescent functioning as rated by their parents which was developed

<sup>1</sup> This scale is used as a dependent variable in examining the first three hypotheses as a test of the concurrent validity of the standard adolescent self-report measures. Thereafter the analyses employ adolescent outcome measures only since the focus of this thesis is on the adolescent's own experience of divorce and of perception of self and family.

for the study, (see Chapter 3). Again, no significant group, sex or age differences are found.

Comment. This series of analyses has asked the traditional question - are adolescents from divorced families less well adjusted than those from intact homes? We have found no evidence that this is so, using both self-report and independently derived measures.

Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 show mean scores by family group and sex for the main outcome variables separately. Figure 4.1 demonstrates the close similarity in self-image for all groups. A non-significant interaction effect is apparent in Figure 4.2, with a trend in the divorced group for lower depression among girls and higher mean scores for boys. Figure 4.3 also indicates an interaction effect - again non-significant - with divorced group boys having higher anxiety scores than girls, while the reverse pattern applies to the intact group.

The next step is to see whether family process variables are associated with adjustment in both groups of families. A series of MANOVAs was carried out examining family happiness, family conflict, parents' psychological health, and two dimensions of parent-adolescent relationships.

Hypothesis 2. Adolescent adjustment will be associated with level of family happiness.

The following question, derived from Bradburn (1969), is the predictor variable in the following analyses (see Table 4.1 for frequency distribution by family group and sex).

*Taking all things together, how happy would you say your family is at present?*

*Would you say that it is (1) very happy, (2) pretty happy, or (3) not too happy these days?*



TABLE 4.1  
Time 1 Family Happiness by Family Group and Sex.

	<u>Intact</u>		<u>Divorced</u>	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Very Happy	10	9	3	3
Pretty Happy	10	7	13	8
Not Happy	1	3	2	4
Total	21	19	18	15

For the first analysis Offer Self-Image (OSIQ) total scores and Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ) depression and anxiety scale scores are fitted as outcome variables, with family happiness, intact or divorced family structure and sex as factors and age as covariate.

Family happiness is significantly related to adolescent adjustment ( $F = 2.8$ ; d.f. = 6,116;  $p = .02$ ). The univariates show that Offer Self-Image contributes most to this result ( $F = 6.5$ ; d.f. = 2,60;  $p = .003$ ), followed by anxiety ( $F = 4.6$ ; d.f. = 2,60;  $p = .01$ ). Depression scale scores are not significantly related to family happiness ( $F = .98$ ; d.f. = 2,60;  $p = .38$ ).

There are no differences according to family structure or sex, no age effects and no interaction between family happiness and intact or divorced family structure.

A second analysis using the Parents' Appraisal Scale as outcome variable also finds a link between adolescents' perception of the level of family happiness and their parents' judgement of adolescent functioning ( $F = 3.2$ ; d.f. = 63,1;  $p = .047$ ). Again there are no effects for sex or family structure or age, and no significant happiness by structure interaction.

Two final ANOVAs examine each family group separately, using parents' scores on the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier,1976) as predictors, and adolescent OSIQ total scores as dependent variable. Parents from intact families rate their current dyadic adjustment, while divorcing parents rate their relationship as it was immediately before separation. Among the intact families adolescent self-image is associated with two out of

eight subscales of the Spanier Scale: mothers' scores on the dyadic satisfaction subscale ( $F = 5.6$ ; d.f. = 30,1;  $p = .02$ ) and fathers' affectional expression scores ( $F = 4.8$ ; d.f. = 30,1;  $p = .036$ ). When a Bonferroni correction is applied these results can be seen as trends only. There are no significant relationships between adolescent scores and parents' pre-separation marital ratings among the divorcing families.

Comment. These results show that in both family groups child and parent measures of adolescent adjustment are significantly linked to adolescent estimates of family happiness. However, parents' ratings of their own dyadic adjustment are only weakly linked to adolescent adjustment, and these trends emerge only in the intact families. Thus adolescent adjustment is linked to current family happiness, and no association is found between adjustment and the high levels of dissatisfaction expressed by divorcing parents with their pre-separation marriages.

It might be argued that the direction of the relationship between perceived family happiness and psychological health is uncertain, since the "well-adjusted" youngster might be more likely to perceive the family in a positive light. If this were so, the scale most likely to be affected by a response set might be expected to be depression. The absence of any relationship between the measure of depressive mood and the adolescents' judgement of family climate suggests that adolescents are capable of forming judgements about family processes that are not merely projections of their own psychological state. The result is confirmed by the significant result obtained when using the independent, parent-derived measure of adolescent adjustment. Thus when the adolescent sees the family as happy, this is reflected in both parental and self-reported measures of good adjustment, while those in unhappy families have poor scores on measures from both sources, being anxious and low in self-esteem.

The conclusion that life in a currently happy family promotes psychological well-being whereas an unhappy climate is associated with poor self-image and anxiety is hardly surprising. Of more interest is the lack of any family or interaction effect, indicating that perceived happiness is a more salient predictor of outcome than is divorced or intact family structure per se. This draws attention to the fallacy of assuming that the divorced family is by definition an unhappy and conflict-riven environment for children.

Happiness is a rather general concept. The analysis now moves on to examine some more specific factors contributing to family processes.

Hypothesis 3: Adolescent adjustment will be associated with level of family conflict.

Family conflict is measured by the interview question presented below. (See Table 4.2 for frequency distributions by family group.)

*Most families have quarrels sometimes. Do the members of your family fight much? Would you say there is (1) a lot, (2) a medium amount or (3) not much fighting in your family?*

TABLE 4.2

Time 1 Family Conflict by Family Group and Sex.

	<u>Intact</u>		<u>Divorced</u>	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
High Conflict	1	5	2	3
Medium Conflict	5	7	2	5
Little Conflict	15	7	14	7
Total	21	19	18	15

A MANOVA was carried out fitting family conflict, sex and family structure as factors, age as a covariate and OSIQ total, NSQ depression and anxiety scales as outcome variables as in previous analyses. No association is found between family structure or sex and adjustment, but family conflict is significantly linked to adolescent psychological health ( $F = 2.3$ ; d.f. = 6,116;  $p = .036$ ). The univariates show that OSIQ total contributes most to this result ( $F = 6.3$ ; d.f. = 2,60;  $p = .003$ ). There is a trend for anxiety ( $F = 4.6$ ; d.f. = 2,60;  $p = .027$ ), but no link between depression and conflict ( $F = .05$ ; d.f. = 2,60;  $p = .96$ ). There is no interaction between family conflict and family structure.

A second analysis examines the same variables, but with the Parents' Appraisal Scale as the dependent variable. A strong relationship between adolescent reports of conflict and

parents' appraisal of adolescent adjustment is found ( $F = 5.3$ ; d.f. = 2,65;  $p = .007$ ). No other relationships reach significance and there is no conflict by family structure interaction.

Comment. These results support the well-established link between high family conflict and poor adolescent adjustment. It is notable that the adolescent's perception of family conflict is linked to adjustment scores whether measured by self-image or by parental appraisal. The absence of any interaction between family structure and conflict indicates that high conflict is maladaptive, whether parents are together or apart. A conflictual intact family is highly stressful, as Nye (1957), Rutter (1971), Raschke and Raschke (1979) and others have shown. But conflict does not necessarily cease with divorce. Prolonged conflict, whatever the family structure, is associated with anxiety and poor self-image among these adolescents.

Hypothesis 4: Adolescent adjustment will be related to levels of parental psychological health.

Parental psychopathology has been shown to affect other family members placing a strain on family functioning (see Chapter 2). Two measures of psychological adjustment were administered to participating parents, the Langner 22-Item Screening Score (Langner, 1962), and the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (Scheier and Cattell, 1961).

A cut-off point of four symptoms is regarded by Langner as indicating moderate to severe psychopathology. Separate MANOVAs were carried out for mothers and fathers with two levels determined by this cutting point as predictors, adolescent OSIQ total and NSQ depression and anxiety as outcomes, and age as a covariate. Table 4.3 cross-tabulates mothers' and fathers' scores.

TABLE 4.3

Langner 22-Item Psychiatric Screening Test  
Mothers' and Fathers' Scores

	Mothers	Fathers
Below 4 symptoms	44	48
Above 4 symptoms	25	12
Total	69	60

Fathers' psychiatric symptoms are significantly associated with adolescent adjustment ( $F = 2.72$ ; d.f. = 3,55;  $p = .05$ ), with the largest effect for adolescent anxiety scores ( $F = 7.77$ ; d.f. = 1,57;  $p = .007$ ). No associations are found for mothers on this measure.

Independent MANOVAs were also carried out using adolescents' NSQ depression and anxiety scales as dependent variables, sex and family group as factors and age, and parents' NSQ depression and anxiety scales as covariates. (Means and standard deviations for these scales appear in Appendix 3.).

This time mothers' scores are significant ( $F = 2.1$ ; d.f. = 6,122;  $p = .05$ ). Inspection of individual univariates shows a significant link between mothers' (but not fathers') and adolescents' depression scores ( $t = 3.0$ ;  $p = .004$ ). Marital status and sex are not significant and there are no interactions.

Comment. These results provide evidence of links between parents' psychological health and adolescent adjustment. Although the association occurs only between fathers' psychopathology and adolescent anxiety and mothers' and adolescents' depression, these results are in the direction of those observed by Rutter (1971) and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980). Lack of any family group or interaction effects suggests that the trend applies irrespective of divorced or intact family structure.

Hypothesis 5: Adolescent adjustment will be associated with the perceived quality of relationships between adolescent and parents.

Parent-child relationships involve family processes of fission and fusion which are especially salient at adolescence. The present series of analyses examines associations between adolescent psychological health and the perceived quality of relationships with both parents along dimensions of care and overprotection.

Rutter (1971) has shown that anti-social behaviour among boys is related to family conflict, but that a good relationship between the child and at least one parent significantly lowers the probability of maladjustment. Rutter's definition of a "good" relationship is one that is warm and affectionate. While this finding is important, little attention has been paid in the divorce literature to other dimensions of parenting. At adolescence independence issues

are especially pressing. Inclusion of a measure of parental overprotection, as well as one of care, permits examination of the inter-relationship of both these important aspects of parenting among adolescents in divorcing and non-divorcing families.

Parker et al (1979), in studies outside the field of divorce, have shown that combinations of care and overprotection yield different patterns of parenting (see Chapter 3). Using populations of normal and depressive subjects, Parker et al have demonstrated that high levels of perceived overprotection and low levels of perceived care are linked with poor adjustment, while reverse patterns are associated with psychological health.

The next four analyses examine each of the parental dimensions separately, with sex and family structure as factors, and age and each PBI scale in turn as covariates. Outcome variables are again OSIQ total, and NSQ depression and anxiety scales. In each of the analyses the parenting scale scores are found to be significantly related to adolescent adjustment, and there are no sex, age or family structure effects. Details are presented below:

Perceived maternal Care. The within cells regression shows a significant relationship between the covariates and outcome variables ( $F = 2.98$ ; d.f. = 6, 132;  $p = .009$ ). Age is not significant. Mothers' care is significantly related to adolescent self-image ( $t = -3.5$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and a trend exists for anxiety ( $t = -2.16$ ,  $p = .034$ ) but not depression. There is no main effect for sex ( $F = 1.33$ ; d.f. = 3, 66;  $p = .27$ ) and family structure does not approach significance ( $F = .25$ ; d.f. = 3, 66;  $p = .86$ ).

Perceived maternal Overprotection. The within cells regression is again significant ( $F = 3.40$ ; d.f. = 6, 132;  $p = .004$ ). Mothers' overprotection is linked to OSIQ total ( $t = 4.22$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and anxiety ( $t = 2.85$ ;  $p = .006$ ). Neither sex ( $F = .79$ ; d.f. = 3, 66;  $p = .50$ ) nor family structure is significant ( $F = .20$ ; d.f. = 3, 66;  $p = .89$ ).

Perceived paternal Care. The within cells regression again shows significant relationships ( $F = 2.36$ ; d.f. = 6, 128;  $p = .034$ ). Fathers' care is related to adolescent self-image ( $t = -3.5$ ;  $p = .001$ ), but not to anxiety or depression. There is no difference according to sex ( $F = .86$ ; d.f. = 3, 64;  $p = .47$ ) nor family structure ( $F = .05$ ; d.f. = 3, 64;  $p = .99$ ).

Perceived paternal Overprotection. Again there is a significant within cells regression ( $F = 2.98$ ; d.f. = 6, 128;  $p = .009$ ). Fathers' overprotection is significantly associated with self-image ( $t = 3.83$ ;  $p = .000$ ), but not with anxiety or depression. Sex ( $F = .39$ ; d.f. = 3,64;  $p = .76$ ) and family structure are non-significant ( $F = .10$ ; d.f. = 3,64;  $p = .96$ ).

Comment. Analysis of each parenting scale separately has shown that adolescent self-image is significantly related to perceived levels of warmth and non-overprotectiveness in fathers and mothers. The p-value for family structure has been between .86 and .99, indicating no differential effects for adolescents according to whether their parents are married or divorcing. It seems, then, that parent-child relationships are an important mediator of psychological adjustment, irrespective of family structure. Following Rutter, the next analysis is based on the hypothesis that a "good" relationship with at least one parent will be related to positive adjustment scores. However, we take Rutter's argument a step further, by predicting that adolescent adjustment is related to the perception of at least one parent not only as caring but also as non-overprotective.

Hypothesis 6: Adolescent psychological adjustment will be related to the perception of at least one parent as highly caring and low in overprotection.

The following analysis examines whether there are associations between adolescent adjustment and the availability of at least one parent who is in Parker's "Optimal" category - that is, seen as high on the care scale and low on the overprotection scale (see Chapter 3, Figure 3.8). Adolescent ratings of each parent on the care and overprotection scales of the Parent Bonding Inventory (PBI) are dichotomised at Parker's normative means (1979). Table 4.4 gives a frequency distribution of optimal parents by sex and family group.

TABLE 4.4

Time 1 Number of Parents High in Care and Low in Overprotection,  
by Sex and Family group

	<u>Intact</u>				<u>Divorced</u>			
	Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Both parents	7	(33)	10	(53)	5	(28)	5	(31)
Mother only	3	(14)	1	(5)	5	(28)	5	(31)
Father only	4	(19)	1	(5)	4	(22)	2	(13)
Neither parent	7	(33)	7	(37)	4	(22)	4	(25)
Total	21	(99)	19	(100)	18	(100)	16	(100)

From Table 4.4 it can be seen that 27 subjects see both parents as highly caring and also non-overprotective, while 25 have one parent in this category. Twenty-two adolescents view neither parent as optimal.

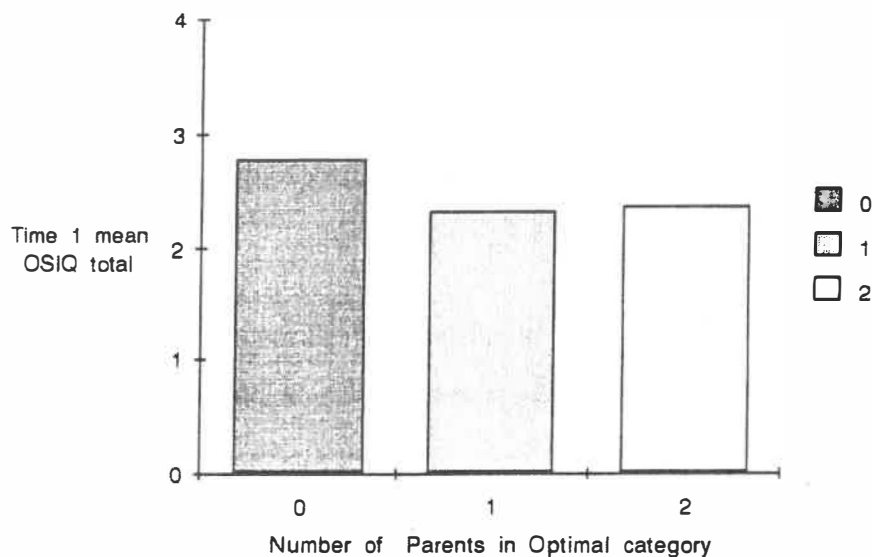
To test whether optimal parenting is associated with positive self-image, these scores are fitted in an ANOVA as two-level factors (optimal/not optimal) for each parent, with family group and sex. Age is a covariate and OSIQ total the dependent variable. Self-image is significantly related to optimal father ( $F = 7.33$ ; d.f. = 67,1;  $p = .009$ ), and optimal mother ( $F = 5.7$ ; d.f. = 67,1;  $p = .019$ ). Family group, sex and age are not significant.

Since the latter variables did not discriminate, they were then dropped and a further analysis was carried out on the total sample. Self-image was found to be significantly associated with the number of optimal parents, ( $F = 9.80$ ; d.f. = 69,2;  $p = .000$ ). Where no parents are seen in this way scores are poorer, but provided there is at least one optimal parent, mean adolescent self-image scores are better than the norms reported by Offer et al (1979), see Figure 4.4.



FIGURE 4.4

Time 1 mean total OSIQ scores by number of optimal parents



Note: Lower scores indicate better adjustment.

Comment. This analysis supports the association between adjustment and the quality of parent-child relationships. In keeping with Rutter's (1971) results, parental warmth and affection are linked to good adjustment: his results have been extended by the finding that warmth needs to be tempered by readiness to encourage independence, and that perception of at least one parent in this way is linked to healthy adolescent self-image.

The failure to find any main effect for family group in this and the previous set of analyses supports the thesis that family processes are more salient than divorced or intact family structure in predicting adolescent adjustment. This may be, as Rutter suggests, because a good relationship with a parent acts as a buffer during a family crisis. Rutter's main focus was on anti-social behaviour, but use of a measure of self-image as the present outcome variable allows speculation as to the functioning of this protective mechanism. An adolescent who feels rejected or neglected by both parents is likely to have a more vulnerable self-image than someone who feels loved and trusted. Where a good relationship is maintained with both parents following divorce the probability of a smooth transition is likely to be high. But even where this is possible with only one parent, it makes good sense

that self-worth can be sustained by a caring parent who understands that adolescents need both love and independence.

### **Within Group Analysis: The Divorced Families at Time 1**

We turn now to look more closely at correlates of adjustment among adolescents from the divorcing families, with special emphasis on aspects of the divorce experience that may contribute to this.

**Hypothesis 7:** Adolescent adjustment in divorcing families will be related to the quality of the relationship with the custodial parent, but not to the sex of the parent nor of the adolescent.

The PBI care and overprotection ratings of custodial parents are entered as covariates (with adolescent age) in a MANOVA. Factors are sex of custodial parent and sex of adolescent. Outcome measures are Offer Self-image total and NSQ depression and anxiety scales.

The Within Cells Regression is significant ( $F = 2.9$ ; d.f. = 9,61;  $p = .007$ ). Univariate relationships show that the OSIQ total ( $F = 5.0$ ; d.f. = 3,27;  $p = .007$ ) and NSQ depression scale ( $F = 3.5$ ; d.f. = 3,27;  $p = .03$ ) contribute most to this result. The levels of care and overprotection of the custodial parent are significantly associated with adolescent adjustment, but age is non-significant. There is no interaction between sex of custodial parent and sex of child, and no main effect for parental sex. There is, however, an overall effect for sex of adolescent ( $F = 4.9$ ; d.f. = 3,25;  $p = .008$ ), with girls having lower depression scores than boys, whether they are living with their mothers or their fathers ( $F = 14.3$ ; d.f. = 1,27;  $p = .001$ ).

**Comment.** These results show that the quality of the relationship of an adolescent with his or her custodial parent is of greater importance than the parent's sex. There is no indication that boys fare better with their fathers, or girls with their mothers, nor that one sex makes a better custodial parent than the other. As the previous analysis has shown, the psychological needs of adolescents seem best met by parents who are caring and non-overprotective. It is reassuring to note that 89 per cent report that they are happy with arrangements for custody and access.

The main effect for sex is interesting. Studies of younger children (see above) have shown that boys tend to be more adversely affected by family separation than girls, and take longer to recover. The present results indicate that although the self-image of boys from divorcing families has not suffered, the depression scores of boys are higher than those of girls. Comparison with population norms (Scheier and Cattell, 1961) shows that mean scores for all cells are within normal or better than normal limits, so the results are not alarming, but they suggest a parallel with the earlier studies. It is interesting that this result emerges as significant only when the relationship with the custodial parent is controlled. Perhaps the buffering effect of a good relationship with the custodial parent has a stronger effect for girls than for boys. Indeed, there is a trend for the divorced group girls to have the lowest depression scores of any group, as can be seen from Figure 4.2.

Hypothesis 8: Adolescent adjustment in divorcing families will be related to the availability of an understanding confidante.

A number of researchers have found that the quality of social support available during a crisis contributes to the ability to cope with the task of restructuring one's life (see Chapter 2). We therefore asked the adolescents the following question:

*When there are real problems in one's life it's often helpful if one can talk about them to someone. Did you have any people you could talk to about your family problems? Did you feel the best person really understood and cared?*

Responses are coded into a three-point scale: 1 = Confidante understanding; 2 = Moderately understanding; 3 = No Confidante. Table 4.5 shows the frequencies of these responses.

TABLE 4.5

Time 1 Number of Adolescents According to Social Support by Sex  
(Divorced Group Only.)

	Boys	Girls	Total
Confidante understanding	5	5	10
Moderately understanding	9	5	14
No confidante	3	4	7
Total	17	14	31

A MANOVA was carried out with OSIQ total, NSQ depression and anxiety as outcome variables, age as covariate, and confidante and sex as factors. There are no significant main effects or interactions. The hypothesis that adjustment would be associated with the presence of an understanding confidante was therefore not supported.

Comment. This result is surprising in view of the strong evidence, especially from crisis theory (Caplan, 1961) that social support is an important determinant of recovery from a major life-event. The frequency table shows that over half the adolescents had either moderately satisfactory or no social support, and yet there is no significant difference in adjustment between those who believe their confidante understood and really cared, and those without this help. The interview material shows that many spoke to their friends about their family problems, but perhaps those in the second category felt that friends from non-divorcing families could not really understand their situation, even though they showed some concern. Another possibility is that some may have derived emotional support from a good relationship with one or other parent, even when communication about the divorce was less than optimal.

Subjects were asked to nominate the person(s) they found best to talk to. Forty per cent chose a same-sexed friend, 23 per cent their mother, 23 per cent an opposite-sexed friend and 20 per cent a brother or sister. Counsellors and teachers were each nominated by 11 per cent, grandparents and other adults by 9 per cent each. It seems to be hard, however, to talk to fathers about family issues as only two children (6 per cent) chose this parent, despite the fact that 27 per cent were living with their fathers.

Hypothesis 9: Adolescent adjustment among divorcing families will be associated with the way in which the separation is experienced, specifically through feelings, acceptance and perception of change in family conflict.

We now move to an area of special interest. Are particular aspects of the experience of divorce associated with good or poor adjustment? Some researchers place strong emphasis on children's emotional response to parental separation, a common implication being that strongly negative feelings are indicative of poor psychological adjustment (e.g. Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b). Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky (1981), are among the few who distinguish between broader psychological adjustment and specific "divorce adjustment", which they see as comprising conceptually separable emotional and cognitive responses to divorce. A particularly interesting aspect of their study is its emphasis on cognitive appraisal. Like Wallerstein and Kelly, however, these authors regard negative feelings about the divorce and failure to regard both parents positively as indicating poor divorce adjustment. The present analysis is based on the assumption that adolescent response to divorce does not depend on a simple positive-negative continuum, but will be influenced by appraisal of particular family situations. It assumes that adolescents may have ambivalent feelings and are capable of separating their own feelings from their understanding of their parents' needs. It also assumes that adolescents' acceptance of the divorce and their attitude to each parent will be determined - at least in part - by objective situational factors, as experienced by the adolescent.

The present analysis examines the association between adolescent adjustment as measured by self-image, anxiety and depression scales, and separate measures of divorce-related feelings, acceptance and perception of conflict change. A moderate association of adjustment with feelings and acceptance is expected, but a stronger relationship between adjustment and change in family climate would be predicted on the basis of the literature on family conflict and happiness.

An exploratory factor analysis of interview items, examining adolescent perception of the divorce and emotional response to it, describes three factors (see Table 4.6). Items loading on these factors become the basis of three scales: Feelings, Acceptance and

Perception of Conflict Change. Interview items used in the process of developing these scales are presented in Appendix Table A6.1).

TABLE 4.6

Time 1 Factor Analysis of Items Measuring  
Adolescent Feelings, Acceptance, and Perception of Conflict Change.

(Principal factoring with Varimax rotation)

Item	F1	F2	F3
* Sad	.84		
* Shocked	.80		
* Can't believe it	.75		
Upset at first, now O.K.	.66		
Don't care	.56		
* Refuse to accept it	.66		
* Family less happy than before separation	.88		
Not much family fighting since separation		.77	
Things are better since separation		.74	
Family very happy at present		.68	
Less tension/ fighting in the family		.57	
Less fighting since the separation than before		(.35)	
* Would you like your parents to get back together?	.73		
Relieved	.67		
* Want parents to re-unite	.67		
Glad	.63		
Family happier now	.58		
Eigen value	6.90	2.97	2.32
% Variance explained	33.6	14.4	11.3
% Variance explained (cumulative)	33.6	48.0	59.3

\*Item reversed to provide consistent keying.

Feelings. (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84$ ). The scale, based on Factor 1, concerns the adolescent's affective response to the divorce and provides a measure of the degree to which it is experienced as strongly upsetting, sad, shocking, and hard to believe, or the reverse.

Perception of Conflict Change. (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ). This scale is defined by Factor 2 and measures perceptions of whether the current state of the family is less

conflictual and happier than before the separation. (It differs from the earlier analyses of conflict and happiness in that the present focus is on divorce-related change.)

Acceptance. (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84$ ). This dimension includes a rather more cognitive aspect, loading on Factor 3 items measuring attitudes to the divorce and parental reconciliation.

Divorce Adjustment Analyses. A series of analyses was performed making use of these three variables. Since there is evidence that school performance may be adversely affected by family upheaval (see Chapter 2) an outcome variable measuring anxiety about school performance was added to the previous measures. It consists of the following interview item:

*Is school-work a problem for you? Tell me if it is*

- (a) a major worry*
- (b) quite a problem*
- (c) a little worrying*
- (d) no problem.*

The first MANOVA has Offer Self-Image total, NSQ depression and anxiety scales and the school anxiety index as outcome measures, sex as a factor, and feelings, acceptance, conflict change and age as covariates. The within cells regression does not reach significance ( $F = 1.7$ ; d.f. = 16,90;  $p = .08$ ), although a univariate relationship between school anxiety and conflict change ( $t = -2.6$ ;  $p = .015$ ) indicates a trend for better school adjustment among those who feel their family situation has improved since separation. There is no main effect for sex, although the univariates again reveal a trend for boys from divorcing families to be more depressed than girls ( $F = 4.9$ ; d.f. = 58,12;  $p = .04$ ).

A MANOVA examining OSIQ subscales was next performed in order to see whether any specific aspects of self-image are affected by the divorce experience. School anxiety is again included, with the previous factor and covariates. This time the within cells regression is significant ( $F = 1.7$ ; d.f. = 48,58;  $p = .02$ ), showing that the measures of divorce response (together with age) jointly affect aspects of self-image. Individual univariates do not reach significance when a Bonferroni correction is applied (see pages 114-115), but a number of trends are evident. Most effect is shown in superior adjustment ( $F = 3.8$ ; d.f. =

4,27;  $p = .01$ ), and school anxiety ( $F = 2.4$ ; d.f. = 4,27;  $p = .02$ ), while family relations ( $F = 2.6$ ; d.f. = 4,27;  $p = .06$ ) and mastery ( $F = 2.5$ ; d.f. = 4,27;  $p = .07$ ) have also contributed to the overall result. Younger adolescents score less well on scales measuring body and self-image ( $t = -2.6$ ;  $p = .02$ ) and sexual attitudes ( $t = -2.5$ ;  $p = .02$ ). There are no significant main effects for sex.

Because of the intrinsic interest of these aspects of the research, the analysis was carried a step further than these relationships might otherwise justify. Regression analyses were next performed on the scales which show the strongest associations. All three divorce response scales were fitted as predictors in each analysis.

Conflict change accounts for 28 per cent of the variance in superior adjustment scores ( $F = 11.9$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and 27 per cent of the variance in school anxiety ( $F = 12.2$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Acceptance of separation explains 16 per cent of the variance in mastery scores ( $F = 5.7$ ,  $p = .02$ ), and 18 per cent of the variance in family relations scores ( $F = 6.7$ ,  $p = .01$ ). No other predictors make significant contributions in these analyses.

Comment. The above analyses show that the way in which the divorce is perceived and experienced is associated with some aspects of adolescent self-image. As hypothesised, adolescents who see the family as happier and less conflict-ridden and accept that their parents' separation is the right decision are more likely to be better adjusted. However there is little indication that divorce-related emotional response is related to adjustment.

The link between improvement in the family climate and reduced school anxiety is interesting. Disruption to school adjustment during the height of the family crisis was reported in several interviews. Awareness that this is likely to change for the better as the family settles down is encouraging.

Hypothesis 10: Adolescent adjustment among divorcing families will be related to their global Divorce Response.

To examine adolescent response to the divorce from a slightly different perspective, a single Divorce Response scale was developed. This alternative scale comprises the following items rated on a four-point scale: not sad, relieved, angry with one parent, angry with both parents, can believe it, glad, don't care, accept separation, upset at first, now



O.K., do not want parents to reunite (see Table 4.7). The scale reflects the adolescent's personal experience of the divorce. It is keyed to represent a largely positive - negative emotional/attitudinal continuum, and is refined by reliability analysis. The items denoting anger were found to be necessary to the scale. The final internal reliability is a little low (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .71$ ), and it cannot, of course, be used in conjunction with the previous divorce scales since items overlap, but it provides a means of looking more closely at patterns in the data along a dimension of positive, but angry, versus negative divorce response.

A MANOVA was first performed, with OSIQ subscales and school adjustment as outcome variables, sex as a factor, and the divorce response scale as a covariate. There is no sex effect, but the within cells regression is significant ( $F = 2.4$ ; d.f. = 12,19;  $p = .046$ ) and inspection of univariates shows trends linking divorce response to family relations ( $F = 7.4$ ; d.f. = 1,30;  $p = .01$ ), mastery ( $F = 6.2$ ; d.f. = 1,30;  $p = .02$ ) and superior adjustment ( $F = 4.4$ ; d.f. = 1,30;  $p = .04$ ).

These results show that while divorce response has a modest connection with aspects of overall adjustment, the two constructs are conceptually separable. A negative or positive emotional response cannot be equated in a one-to one way with psychological health. Further investigation of the correlates of divorce response is necessary in order to understand this more clearly.

Correlates of Divorce Response. The next step is exploratory, rather than hypothesis-based, and is included in order to illuminate the results already obtained. Correlations were carried out between the divorce response scale and all adolescent interview items. Because of the multiple comparisons involved, only correlations with a probability less than .009 are included, and resulting inter-correlations are presented simply as contrasting profiles. The relevant interview questions are presented in Appendix Table A6.2.

A positive response to the divorce is associated with strong expectation that a separation would occur ( $r = .52$ ;  $p = .001$ ) and the belief that the family is happier now ( $r = .72$ ,  $p = .000$ ). A striking feature of this picture is the adolescent's attitude towards his or her father. Feeling glad, relieved but angry is associated with getting on worse with Dad than one year ago ( $r = .51$ ;  $p = .001$ ), self and Dad not understanding one another ( $r = .40$ ;  $p$

= .008), not enjoying visits to the non-custodial parent ( $r = .57$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and preferring not to have to go on access visits ( $r = .44$ ;  $p = .004$ ). Adolescents responding to the scale in this way also answer OSIQ and PBI items concerning the father negatively, and father receives a small investment of "self" ( $r = .58$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Other correlates include having few problems about sex ( $r = .41$ ;  $p = .008$ ) and parents not knowing friends ( $r = .45$ ;  $p = .007$ ).

While a positive response seems to imply a bad family situation before the separation, and a very negative relationship between father and adolescent, the reverse poles of these correlations also imply that fathers play a major role in divorce adjustment. The adolescent who is sad, neither glad nor relieved, does care, wants parents to reunite, refuses to accept the divorce, and is not angry with parents, correspondingly speaks warmly of his or her father, enjoys access visits, had no expectation of the separation, wants parents to reunite, and does not feel that the family is happier than before. For the first group divorce is experienced as a heartfelt relief, for the second it has meant separation from a loved parent. Among these are the adolescents who tell us emphatically that they want to maintain their relationship with both parents, and who deeply resent attempts by one parent to enlist them against the other.

These profiles illustrate the two poles of the divorce response scale, but many cases fall between the extremes. Table 4.7 gives frequencies for these response items, and shows that the majority of adolescents express both sadness and acceptance of their parents' decision.

TABLE 4.7

Time 1 Frequencies: Divorce Response Scale Items

	Strongly		Fairly		A little		Not at all	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
* Sad	7	(20)	7	(20)	17	(49)	4	(11)
Relieved	4	(11)	6	(17)	8	(23)	17	(49)
Angry with one parent	5	(14)	6	(17)	6	(17)	18	(51)
Angry with both parents	1	(3)	0	(0)	9	(26)	25	(71)
* Can't believe it	8	(23)	5	(14)	6	(17)	16	(46)
Glad	4	(11)	6	(17)	4	(11)	21	(60)
Don't care	3	(9)	0	(0)	6	(17)	26	(74)
* Refuse to accept it	3	(9)	0	(0)	7	(20)	25	(71)
Upset at first, now OK	11	(31)	12	(34)	4	(11)	8	(23)
* Want parents to re-unite	4	(11)	3	(9)	5	(14)	23	(66)

\* Item reversed in scale to provide consistent keying.

Table 4.7 shows that while 89 per cent of adolescents experience strong to moderate sadness over the divorce, 51 per cent also express some degree of relief, and 71 per cent accept it as a reality. There is also evidence that between the separation and the actual divorce (mean = 18 months) recovery from the initial upset has been taking place among 76 per cent of the respondents. Sixty-six per cent do not want their parents to reunite.

Comment. The correlational analysis differs from the previous ones in that the aim is to examine patterns related to divorce response rather than to test its impact on adolescent adjustment. It is interesting to note that attitudes to the father are significantly associated with this measure. The first situation represents a family where high conflict has existed, with very tense relations between adolescent and father. Among the sample are families where the father was violent and abusive. It is not surprising that adolescents from this background are relieved that the marriage is over, and still feel anger towards the father. In other families adolescents are strongly attached to the absent father and feel regret and sadness over the marriage breakdown. No significant correlations between emotional

response and relationships with the mother are found, presumably because mother-child relationships appear to vary less and tend to be close.

While the MANOVA has shown that a modest relationship exists between divorce response and overall psychological adjustment, the correlational analysis helps us to understand why this association is not stronger. Acceptance of the divorce, and anger towards the father may be realistic for some, but sadness may be an appropriate mourning response for others and does not necessarily indicate poor adjustment. The majority of the group lies between these two extremes, expressing both sadness and some degree of relief, and indicating varying degrees of recovery from the initial impact of their parents' separation.

The results point to the need, noted in Chapter 3, to allow for variability in family situations in designing divorce measures. Assumptions that a positive view of each parent and of the divorce itself indicate "good" divorce adjustment may be an over-simplification of an event where ambivalent feelings are common, and objective situations vary greatly.

Hypothesis 11. No differences according to Sex or Age are predicted for the above comparisons.

Few age effects have been found in the above analyses, but some sex effects have emerged. A main effect for sex in the second comparative analysis, as reported above, finds that irrespective of family structure girls have better scores on the OSIQ morals scale, and scores indicating less developed sexual attitudes. Both of these findings are consistent with the normative studies of Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1981a). These authors comment that adolescent boys appear to be more open to their sexuality than girls, and that younger girls differ most strongly. The present sample consists of young teenagers (13 -16), and the observed sex difference is largely attributable to this scale.

No significant sex or family structure by sex interaction effects emerge in the other between-groups comparisons, although Figures 4.2 and 4.3 illustrate a trend for boys to be rather more anxious and depressed. Analyses of the divorced group alone contain indications that girls from the divorcing families have better than usual depression scores. This emerges as a main effect in the custody analysis, when adjustment is controlled for

quality of parent-child relationships, although there are no sex of parent by sex of child effects (see above). It again emerges as a trend in the first divorce response analysis.

### **Time 1 Model: Minimum Adequate Sub-set of Variables**

#### **Explaining Maximum Variance in Adjustment Scores.**

The above analyses have shown that adolescent adjustment is related to a number of family process and divorce response variables. It is now time to examine the joint contribution of variables in an attempt to establish the minimum subset explaining the maximum amount of variance in adjustment scores.

In developing the final model, responses to interview items considered on the basis of prior research to have a bearing on adolescent self-image were first correlated with adolescent self-image scores. These included indicators of socio-economic status such as fathers' and mothers' occupations, income and educational level; levels of current family happiness and conflict; number of life changes experienced due to divorce (e.g. change of school, home, district, loss of friends, mother now working, increase in household responsibilities); explanation and support during separation; divorce response items; satisfaction with custody and access; presence of a new partner for mother and/or father. Only responses concerning family happiness and conflict reach a level of significance acceptable for these multiple comparisons ( $\alpha = .009$ ).

When variables already found to have weak or unrelated associations with Offer Self-Image total scores in the MANOVAs reported above are eliminated, only the four Parent Bonding scales, happiness and conflict remain. The optimal parent analysis (Hypothesis 6) has shown considerable variation between parents, nevertheless some intercorrelation between parenting variables is to be expected. Table A3.6, Appendix 3, shows moderate but significant correlations between all scales. The strongest pattern is a negative within-parent correlation of overprotection with care (mothers:  $r = -.51$ ,  $p = .000$ ; fathers:  $r = -.44$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Inter-parent correlations are lower, the highest being overprotection ( $r = .33$ ,  $p = .002$ ). These relationships do not reach the level of co-linearity, but it is important to note the overlap in interpreting the following model.

In this analysis the Aitkin method of model reduction is followed (Aitkin, 1974). This is a conservative procedure used to identify the minimum set of variables explaining the maximum amount of variance. By controlling the effects on Type 1 error rates of examining many orders of fit, relationships between inter-correlated variables can be examined, identifying those explaining variance over and above common variance.

The four Parent Bonding variables and conflict are fitted in different orders in successive analyses. Each is highly significant when fitted first, but those dropping below  $p = .05$  when fitted last are dropped from the model. Age, sex and family group are also examined. The common contribution of all four parenting variables is therefore subsumed by those retained by this procedure. The final model contains three variables that explain 34 per cent of the variance in Offer Self-Image total scores. Table 4.8 presents these results.

TABLE 4.8

Analysis of Variance TableReduced Model Explaining Variance in Offer Self-Image Scores at Time 1

	SS	DF	MS	F	SIG of F
Within + Residual	8.70	67	.13		
MOVER	2.35	1	2.35	18.09	.000
FOVER	1.55	1	1.55	11.95	.001
FCARE	.53	1	.53	4.10	.047
(MODEL)	4.43	3	1.48	11.38	.000
(TOTAL)	13.14	70	.19		

R-SQUARED = .34

An alternative model supports the validity of this result in a rather striking way. When an interview item indicating degree of worry about independence from parents is fitted with the above variables the two overprotection items are eliminated, leaving only independence and father care. The variance explained is 32 per cent. This result underlines the important contribution that independence issues make to adolescent self-image. (See Appendix Table A6.2, item 17.1.a.)

Comment. The final model demonstrates that family processes are strongly implicated in adolescent adjustment whether parents are together or apart. Thirty-four per cent of explained variance is a substantial proportion. As noted above, however, it is necessary to interpret this result carefully. Exclusion of variables from the reduced model does not imply that their previously established contribution to adolescent adjustment can be disregarded. It may indicate overlap with variables retained, or greater variability in scores among the remaining variables. Mother care, for example, has a significance of  $p = .000$  when fitted first, and yet is the first to be dropped from the reduced model when fitted last. It seems likely that this is due in part to intercorrelation with other variables, and also to lack of variability due to the consistently warm nature of mother-child relations for most individuals in this sample. (See Appendix 3, Table A3.5.) Amato (1987) comments on a similar phenomenon in interpreting results from the *Australian Children in Families* study. As has been shown above in the correlational profiles produced by the divorce response analysis, there appears to be much more variability in children's relations with their fathers.

The salience of father-child relations for adolescent self-image is an important finding. A father seen as warm and encouraging independence seems to promote high self-esteem, while the reverse is true if he is seen as dominating and intrusive. Failure to find a family structure effect suggests that these results hold good, whether parents are together or not. A rewarding relationship with both parents is clearly desirable if it is possible, as earlier research has shown for younger children (Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1979; Hess and Camara, 1979; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b), but the present results draw attention to the possibility of both positive and negative influences. They lead to the implication that the quality of an adolescent's relationship with either parent following divorce should be a key factor in determining such issues as custody and frequency of access - though the possibility of change occurring in the nature of parent-child relationships over time suggests the wisdom of providing for flexibility in these arrangements.

A particularly interesting result is the negative association between over-protection and self-image. Much emphasis has been placed in previous studies on the link between family disruption and anti-social behaviour, with the implication that lack of parental control following separation accounts for deviance among adolescents from divorced families

(Dornbusch et al. 1985). The present results point to the need to recognise heterogeneity among divorcing families. This sample highlights the other side of the coin, emphasising the need for independence and autonomy at adolescence in both intact and separated families. The need to differentiate from parents, especially - perhaps - from those who are highly caring, comes across strongly in these results. As Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) have suggested, this may be a special trap for some adolescents following divorce.

Although previous research has indicated a strong relationship between conflict and child adjustment, this analysis suggests that the nature of parent-child relations supersedes this factor. Several explanations for this may be given. Firstly, as Rutter (1971) has shown, good parent-child relationships may shield a child from the effects of conflict. Secondly, it may well be that where family conflict is abusive or violent it is already expressed in the adolescent's ratings of one or each parent, so these scores may incorporate the effects of conflict. Thirdly, this effect may represent the "strategic withdrawal" strategy noted by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) and other writers, where adolescents seek to distance themselves from parents' struggles: family conflict would therefore play a less central role than their own relationships with each parent.

### **Time 1 Discussion**

The present discussion relates the results reported above to issues emerging from the literature. A discussion of theoretical implications is presented in Chapter 8.

The Time 1 analyses have strongly confirmed the existence of a link between family processes and adolescent adjustment. Repeated failure to find any relationship between family group and adolescent outcome - using both parent-derived and self-report measures - supports the contention that divorced or intact family structure in itself is a poor predictor. Rather, it has been shown that adolescent self-image is associated with factors such as the quality of family life and the nature of parent-child relationships, both in the intact family and also following separation.

The present results do not support the strongly negative picture of adolescents in divorce as revealed in the clinical literature. There is evidence of sadness and disruption, but little to support the psychodynamic view that adolescence is an intrinsically unstable



developmental phase and that parental divorce at this stage therefore causes acute suffering and destabilisation (Schwartzberg, 1980; Sorosky, 1977; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b). Control group comparisons, and use of normative measures have permitted examination of this question, and no greater deficits have been found for those in divorcing families. Processes present in both family groups are more predictive of adjustment than is divorced or intact family structure. The disparity in findings may be attributed, at least in part, to sampling differences. Clinicians naturally see the most vulnerable cases, while the present study is based on a broad, court-derived sample. While recognising the greater vulnerability of some adolescents, our findings show that although divorce is a sad and disturbing event it need not be associated with serious psychological disruption. Good parent-child relations and diminished conflict can hasten the process of recovery.

Sampling and methodological differences may explain disparities among results of non-clinical studies too. The present finding of no group differences in adolescent self-image supports the studies of Berg and Kelly, 1979; Feldman and Feldman, 1975; Ochiltree and Amato, 1984; Pardek and Izikoff, 1983; Partridge and Kotler, 1987; Raschke and Raschke, 1979; and Slater and Haber, 1984. Contrary results are reported by Devall, Stoneman and Brody, 1986; Harper and Ryder, 1986; Rosenthal, Peng and McMillan, 1980, and in some of the studies by the group headed by Parish (see Chapter 2).

Regional and sub-cultural differences in communities sampled, and variability in response rates according to whether a study involves survey completion in class or individual home interviews may affect the nature of a sample, and the ratio of troubled respondents. It would be rash indeed to claim to show definitively that children are - or are not - harmed by divorce. A question of more general interest is that of the relationship between self-image and processes that are common to differing family groups. Use of a control group can distinguish between divorce-specific and developmental issues, and identify family processes that mediate adjustment whether parents are together or apart, pointing the way to intervention.

The finding that family conflict is associated with poor adjustment in both separated and intact families is supported by a large body of literature (Amato, 1987; Bennington, 1986; Block, et al., 1981; Chess et al., 1983; Emery, 1982; Emery and O'Leary, 1982; Farber et

al.,1985; Jacobson,1978a; Kurdek and Blisk,1983; Kurdek and Sinclair,1988; McCord and McCord,1959; Nye,1957; Ochiltree and Amato,1984; Porter and O'Leary,1980; Preston,1986; Raschke and Raschke,1979; Rutter,1971,1981; Slater and Haber,1984; Whitehead, 1978; and others.) The present results, moreover, illuminate aspects of this issue which have been the subject of some debate, by showing that family conflict affects girls as well as boys, and is not only associated with undercontrolled behaviour, as reported by Rutter (1971,1981); but also affects aspects of intra-psychic functioning categorised by Emery (1982) as "over-controlled", that is, anxiety and negative self-image. In this, our results extend Rutter's findings and support those of Whitehead (1978).

The analyses of data from divorced group adolescents confirms the negative effect of continuing conflict, and also draws attention to the sense of relief, accompanied by positive self-image scores, amongst those for whom conflict has diminished and who experience the family climate as much improved.

Rutter's seminal work (1971,1981) demonstrates that even where the family is severely disturbed, the presence of a warm relationship with at least one parent significantly reduces the probability of child maladjustment. The present study takes this analysis further by examining the nature of parent-adolescent relations in terms both of warmth and also of overprotection. These dimensions have been found to be relevant to psychopathology (Anthony,1974c; Parker,1983) and are consonant with child-rearing styles identified by Baumrind, (1971) and with patterns recognised in Family Systems theory (Olson and McCubbin, 1983), but have rarely been integrated into divorce research. The results indicate the importance of both dimensions, and show that good adjustment is associated with the availability of at least one parent who is both highly caring and also non-overprotective. This finding confirms and adds specificity to Rutter's contention that a "good" relationship with a parent may act as a buffer in times of family crisis. It draws attention to the developmental process of differentiation from the family at adolescence, and the need for parents to facilitate this by encouraging autonomy within a caring context.

The additional finding that adjustment following divorce is related to the nature of the adolescent's relationship with the custodial parent, rather than to the sex of the child or of the parent, has a practical bearing on custody and access decision-making.

Close examination of the correlates of divorce response indicates the need for researchers to be aware of the subtle and complex aspects of this issue. Attitudes to the father (the non-custodial parent in the majority of cases) were found to vary greatly, and to be strongly implicated in the way in which the divorce is experienced. The importance of the non-custodial father has been recognised (Feldman and Feldman, 1975; Hess and Camara, 1979; Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1979; Jacobson, 1978b; Kurdek, 1987; Stevenson 1987; Warshak and Santrock, 1983; and others), and the continued involvement of each parent following divorce has been seen as highly desirable. The present results confirm the salience of the father, but show that his influence can be either negative or beneficial. Much more research is needed into ways of helping children come to terms with their strong and sometimes highly ambivalent feelings towards their non-custodial parent.

Positive affect, acceptance of the divorce, and a favourable view of each parent is seen by some as indicating "good" divorce adjustment and is equated with psychological health. But Tolstoy's famous dictum that "all happy families are alike, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" should alert us to the heterogeneity of divorcing families. Sadness may be a healthy mourning response when a loved parent leaves, just as anger and blame may be realistic in some circumstances. It is important that measures of divorce adjustment be flexible enough to take account of specific situations, and that realistic expressions of sorrow or anger are distinguished from pathology.

No sex differences in self-image scores have been found between adolescent boys and girls from divorcing families in the present study, but there are indications that the divorced group boys may experience a higher level of depression, although their mean scores are within normal limits. The norm comparisons (Table A3.4) indicate rather high anxiety levels among the divorced group boys, although no significant differences between the groups have emerged from the main analyses, all the adolescent scores being somewhat elevated by comparison with the adult normative population. These results partially support studies of younger children which have shown that boys may be more strongly affected than girls by family disruption (Burns, 1980; Emery and O'Leary, 1982; Guidubaldi et al, 1986; Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1979; Hodges and Bloom, 1984; Kurdek and Berg, 1983; Porter and O'Leary, 1980; Rutter, 1971), but the lack of significant difference in self-image

suggests that adolescents may have more coping resources at their disposal than younger boys.

Some of the present results fail to repeat effects found in other studies. Little relationship was found between parents' adjustment levels and those of their children, social support in the form of a confidante was not related to adjustment, and although significant differences were found between income levels in intact and divorcing families (see Chapter 3), these were unrelated to adolescent adjustment. The only explanation that can be offered is that the family process effects already discussed have exerted a stronger influence on the present sample than these other variables.

The picture that emerges from the Time 1 results gives a freeze-frame image of these families at a certain moment in time - for the separated group it is close to the point of divorce. The longitudinal nature of the study enables us to ask, how are these adolescents coping three years later? and what are the factors at Time 1 that predict adjustment at Time 2?

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## CHAPTER 5

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### RESULTS OF ANALYSES: TIME 2

In 1985 as many of the adolescents as could be contacted were asked to participate in a further round of interviews. Details of sample characteristics are presented in Chapter 3. The present chapter follows the structure of the preceding one, in that it contains the results of a cross-sectional analysis of data from the second round of interviews. First we look to see if there are differences between the adolescents whose parents divorced three years earlier and those who remained together; then variables associated with adjustment for the whole sample are examined, followed by the effects of factors specific to the divorced families. Age and sex are also examined. A minimum adequate subset model is then developed.

In Chapter 6 a predictive model is presented, indicating the Time 1 variables which together explain the maximum variance in Time 2 adjustment scores. A final model includes both Time 1 and Time 2 variables.

#### Between Groups Analysis: Time 2

Hypothesis 12. There will be no significant differences in adolescent adjustment scores according to intact or divorced family structure at Time 2.

A MANOVA was carried out with OSIQ total, NSQ anxiety and depression scales as outcome measures, family structure and sex as factors, and age as a covariate. There is no difference in adjustment according to family structure ( $F = .13$ ; d.f. = 3,56;  $p = .94$ ) and no sex effect, or sex by structure interaction, but age is significant ( $F = 3.0$ ; d.f. = 3,56;  $p = .04$ ). Depression and anxiety scores are not significantly influenced by age, but older adolescents - both boys and girls - have better self-image scores ( $F = 5.3$ ; d.f. = 1,58;  $p = .03$ ), than their younger counterparts, irrespective of whether their parents are together or apart. Figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 show mean outcome scores by sex and family group.

FIGURE 5.1

Time 2 mean Offer Self-Image scores by sex and family group

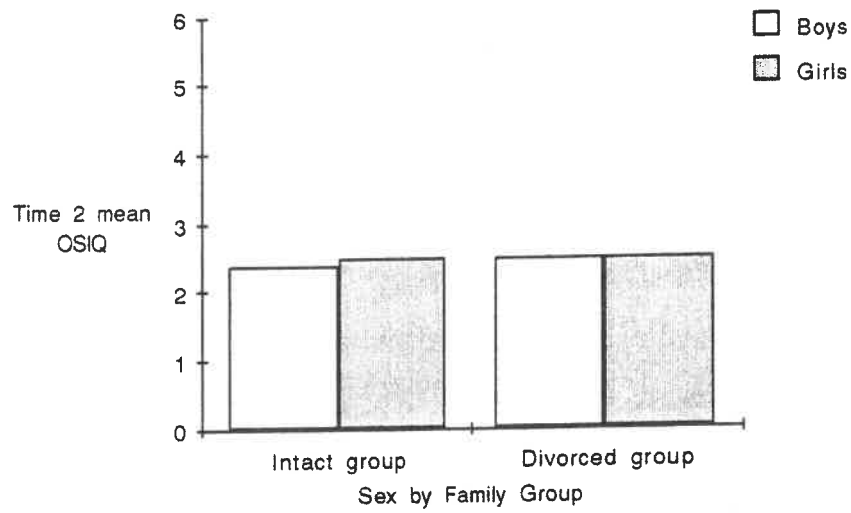


FIGURE 5.2

Mean Time 2 Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire Depression Subscale  
by sex and family group

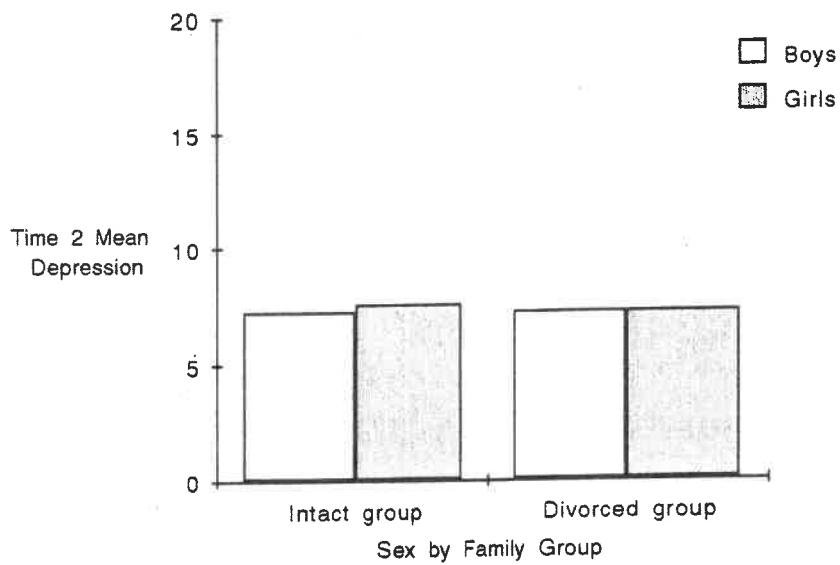
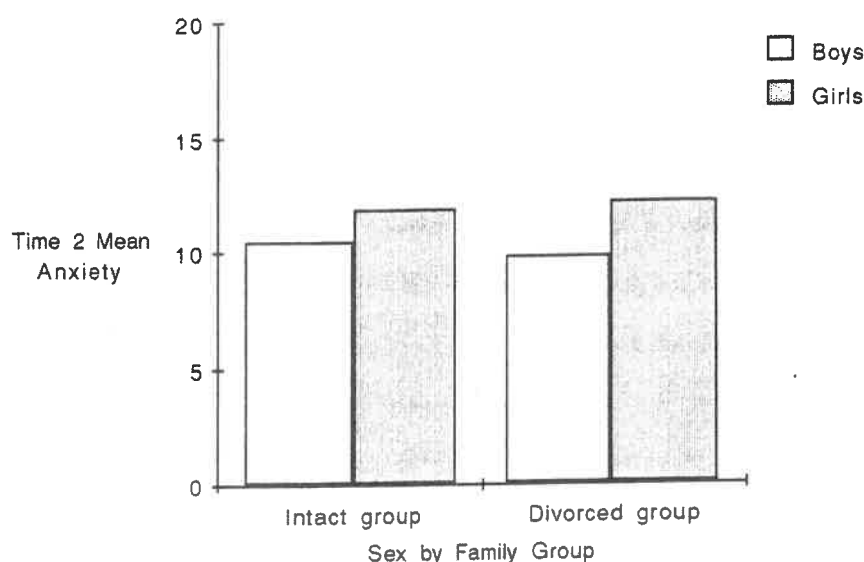


FIGURE 5.3

Time 2 Mean Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire Anxiety Subscale  
by sex and family group



Note: Lower scores indicate better adjustment.

Comment. As before, the analysis has found no differences in adjustment between adolescents from intact and separated homes. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate this similarity. Figure 5.3 shows a non-significant trend for girls from both family groups to be more anxious than boys.

Ages now range from 16 to 19 and a significant age effect has emerged with older adolescents achieving better self-image scores. Developmental theory would predict that older adolescents would have a more clearly developed sense of identity and would have negotiated more of the independence struggles that are common in adolescence. Twenty subjects (31 per cent) are still facing the demands of senior high school. Life for these adolescents is very different from those who are working or are in tertiary education. Age is controlled in the following analyses by including it as a covariate throughout.

A second MANOVA, fitting the 11 OSIQ subscales as outcome variables, was next carried out to ascertain whether specific aspects of adolescent self-image differ according to family structure or age. This time family structure, with age controlled, approaches significance ( $F = 2.0$ ; d.f. = 11,48;  $p = .053$ ). There are no other main or interaction effects, although univariates show a trend for older adolescents to score better on the morals

( $t = -2.2$ ;  $p = .03$ ), family ( $t = -2.1$ ;  $p = .04$ ), and mastery scales ( $t = -2.12$ ;  $p = .04$ ). On examination of the univariates contributing to the family structure result, only the sexual attitudes scale approaches significance ( $F = 3.9$ ;  $d.f. = 1,58$ ;  $p = .054$ ). Inspection of means shows that divorced group boys and girls show somewhat more advanced psychosexual development. Small differences on some other scales do not systematically favour one group or the other but have presumably contributed to the overall result.

Comment. Although a borderline family structure difference emerges from the second analysis, no differences approaching significance are found on 10 of the 11 scales. The sexual attitudes scale is one that Offer et al (1981a) have found to be uncorrelated with other dimensions of the self, and they recommend that these scores not be included in the total self-image score. It may be that the experience of family separation has tended to hasten psycho-sexual maturity for these adolescents, although the result can only be seen as a non-significant trend.

Hypothesis 13: Adolescents from divorced families will be more ready for intimate heterosexual relationships than those from intact families.

A question of some importance concerns whether the experience of parental divorce at adolescence has a disturbing effect on psychosexual development, and especially whether it affects heterosexual relationships. As noted above, there are conflicting findings in the literature, suggesting that marital separation may on the one hand increase the likelihood of early sexual experience, or on the other hand may cause wariness about commitment to an intimate relationship (Kelly, 1981). The analysis reported above suggests that psychosexual maturity may be rather more advanced among the divorced group, but the question of whether these adolescents are more wary about intimacy needs further investigation. In order to examine this question the Intimacy scale from the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (Rosenthal, Gurney and Moore, 1981) is fitted as dependent variable in an ANOVA, with age as covariate, and family group and sex as predictors. Intimacy scores are unrelated to family structure ( $F = .9$ ;  $d.f. = 1,59$ ;  $p = .34$ ), and there are no other main or interaction effects.



The EPSI is an attitudinal rather than a behavioural measure, indicating psychological readiness for intimacy rather than sexual experience per se. The failure to find any difference between adolescents from intact or divorced families on this measure suggests that divorce has not affected attitudes in a negative way. However interview responses indicate that the experience may after all have had some influence on both behaviour and attitudes.

These indicate a rather higher rate of sexual activity among those from divorced families (48 per cent are engaging in sexual intercourse compared with 34 per cent of the comparison group, and two ex-nuptial births have taken place). There is lower satisfaction among the divorced family group with their current relationship (71 per cent of the intact family group report high satisfaction, versus 47 per cent among the divorced group). There is little difference in marriage expectation, with 86 per cent from intact and 80 per cent from divorced families expecting to marry some day. De facto marriage - mainly as a means of getting to know a partner before committing oneself to marriage - is advocated by 66 per cent of the divorced group, and 43 per cent of the intact family group. Adolescents from both family types are aware of the high divorce rate: sixty-nine per cent of those from intact families report at least one close friend from a separated home, while 14 per cent have 5 or more such friends. Half the divorced group cite this as a deterrent to marriage, while a quarter of those from intact families say the same, despite the high marriage expectancy rate among both groups. (Items appear in Appendix Table A7.3.)

Comment. Although no difference was found on the intimacy scale, it does seem that the adolescents from divorced homes may be a little more wary, and may be somewhat more sexually active than those from the intact families. However it is interesting to note that family group differences in attitudes are not great among these members of a cohort which has grown up with knowledge of the high rate of relationship failure.

Hypothesis 14: Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 will be associated with level of current family happiness.

The current family happiness question asked at Time 1 was repeated, and responses are fitted as before with family structure and sex as factors in a MANOVA, age as covariate and OSIQ total and NSQ depression and anxiety scales as dependent variables. Current

family happiness is significantly related to adolescent adjustment ( $F = 2.8$ ; d.f. = 6,96;  $p = .01$ ), with self-image score showing the strongest relationship ( $F = 7.1$ ; d.f. = 2,50;  $p = .002$ ). Neither family structure nor sex is significant, and there are no significant interactions. Older age is related to better adjustment ( $F = 4$ ; d.f. = 3,48;  $p = .01$ ).

Comment. As was the case at the first interview, adolescent self-image is related to family happiness, irrespective of sex or whether both parents are together or not.

Hypothesis 15: Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 will be associated with level of family conflict.

The current family conflict question previously asked was again included. A MANOVA is carried out with conflict, family structure and sex as factors, age as covariate, and OSIQ total, NSQ depression and anxiety as outcome variables. Current family conflict is again significantly related to adolescent adjustment ( $F = 2.54$ ; d.f. = 6,92;  $p = .025$ ). The outcome variables most affected by level of conflict are self-image ( $F = 3.15$ ; d.f. = 2,48;  $p = .05$ ), and depression ( $F = 3$ ; d.f. = 2,48;  $p = .06$ ). There is no effect for family structure or sex, and no family structure by conflict interaction. Age is again shown to be associated with adjustment ( $F = 3$ ; d.f. = 3,46;  $p = .04$ ).

Comment. Family conflict is significantly related to psychological well-being among 16 to 19-year-olds, whether they live in two-parent or divorced homes. This finding underlines the previous finding that family turmoil affects adjustment.

Hypothesis 16: Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 will be associated with the perceived quality of relationships between adolescents and parents.

As at Time 1, we first examine the relationship between adolescent adjustment scores and their perception of each parent along dimensions of care and overprotection in a series of MANOVAs. In each case OSIQ total and NSQ depression and anxiety scales are outcome variables, family structure and sex are factors, and each dimension is fitted in turn, with age as covariate.

Perceived Maternal Care. The within cells regression is significant ( $F = 5.1$ ; d.f. = 6, 108;  $p = .000$ ). Offer Self-Image ( $F = 11.23$ ; d.f. 2,56;  $p = .000$ ) and depression scores are

both affected ( $F = 4.6$ ;  $d.f. = 2,56$ ;  $p = .014$ ). Offer scores are influenced mainly by mother's care ( $t = -3.9$ ;  $p = .000$ ) but also by age ( $t = -2.3$ ;  $p = .02$ ). There is a trend for depression scores to be affected by both covariates: care ( $t = 2.1$ ;  $p = .04$ ); age ( $t = -2.4$ ;  $p = .02$ ). There are no sex or family structure effects or interactions.

Perceived Maternal Overprotection. Again the within cells regression is significant ( $F = 4.9$ ;  $d.f. = 6, 108$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Of the three dependent variables adolescent self-image ( $F = 13.5$ ;  $d.f. = 2,56$ ;  $p = .000$ ) is significant, and it is overprotection rather than age that exercises this influence ( $t = 4.4$ ;  $p = .000$ ). There are no differences according to family structure or sex.

Perceived Paternal Care. Adolescent outcome measures are significantly affected by the combination of age and father's care ( $F = 3$ ;  $d.f. = 6, 108$ ;  $p = .01$ ), with significant association found in self-image scores ( $F = 6.8$ ;  $d.f. = 2,56$ ;  $p = .002$ ). Both covariates contribute to this effect: age ( $t = -2.5$ ;  $p = .02$ ) and care ( $t = -2.6$ ;  $p = .01$ ). Neither family structure nor sex is significant.

Perceived Paternal Overprotection. Again the within cells regression is significant ( $F = 4.3$ ;  $d.f. = 6, 108$ ;  $p = .001$ ). Self-image scores are most strongly associated with father's overprotection ( $F = 10.4$ ;  $d.f. = 2,56$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and this is so regardless of family group, or sex. Age does not contribute significantly to this result.

Comment. These results confirm the above hypotheses and extend the Time 1 results, indicating that the quality of the relationship of an adolescent with each parent is strongly linked to his or her self-image at Time 2 whether both parents are together or not. When care is a predictor, age also contributes to self-image scores though to a lesser extent, but age is not significant with overprotection. Perhaps parents are commonly more protective of younger adolescents, masking an independent age effect.

Hypothesis 17: Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 will be associated with the perception of at least one parent as highly caring and low in overprotection.

As in the Time 1 analyses adolescent ratings of each parent on the care and overprotection scale are dichotomised at Parker's normative means, allowing classification in terms of whether each, one or neither parent is seen as "optimal", that is, more caring and

less overprotective than the normative mean. Table 5.1 provides frequencies, by sex and family structure.

TABLE 5.1  
Time 2 Number of "Optimal" Parents by Sex and Family Structure.

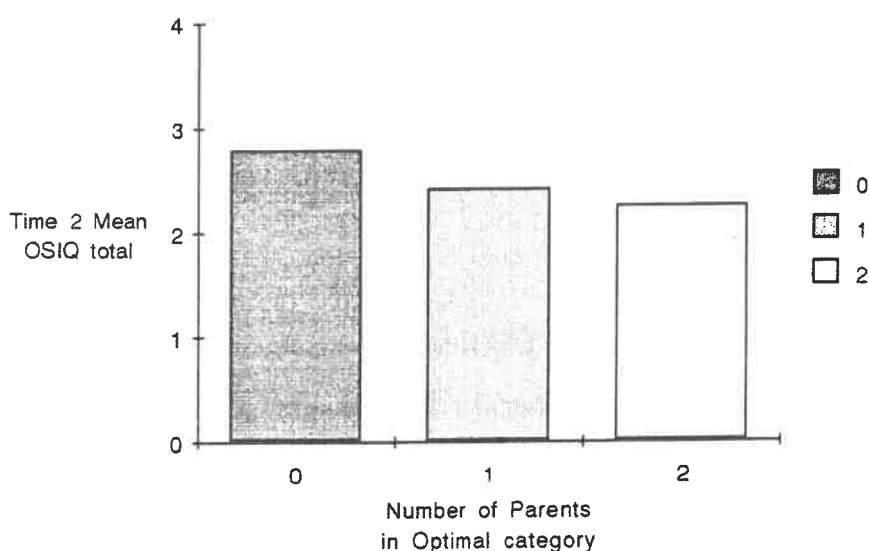
	<u>Intact</u>				<u>Divorced</u>			
	Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Both optimal	6	(33)	6	(40)	5	(38.5)	5	(50)
Mother optimal	5	(28)	3	(20)	2	(15)	2	(20)
Father optimal	3	(17)	1	(7)	1	(8)	0	(0)
Neither optimal	4	(22)	5	(33)	5	(38.5)	3	(30)
Total	18	(100)	15	(100)	13	(100)	10	(100)

An ANOVA was carried out with parental scores (optimal/not optimal), sex and family group as two-level factors, age as covariate, and OSIQ total as dependent variable. Family structure, sex and age are not significant, but self-image is strongly associated with optimal mother ( $F = 17.7$ ; d.f. = 59,1;  $p = .000$ ), and is also linked to optimal father ( $F = 6.0$ ; d.f. = 59,1;  $p = .018$ ).

A second analysis, dropping the non-significant variables, shows that for the total sample the number of optimal parents is significantly related to self-image ( $F = 12.68$ ; d.f. = 60,2;  $p = .000$ ). Figure 5.1 illustrates this result showing, as at Time 1, that good parenting is indeed an asset and those with neither parent in this category have the lowest adjustment scores.

FIGURE 5.4

Time 2 mean total OSIQ scores by number of optimal parents



Note: Lower scores indicate better adjustment.

Comment. These results again support Rutter's finding that adjustment is associated with the quality of the relationship between parent and youngster. A good relationship with at least one parent - and preferably with two - is significantly related to favourable self-image scores, irrespective of whether parents are living together or not. The results of the four preceding analyses show that each dimension is psychologically important, in both groups of families.

Hypothesis 18: Adolescent adjustment will be related to the availability of an understanding confidante.

At the second round of interviews both groups of adolescents were asked about the availability of social support:

*When you have problems or difficulties is there anyone you can talk about them with? How well do you feel this person really understands and cares?*

Responses are coded on a three-point scale: 1 = understanding; 2 = moderately understanding; 3 = no confidante. Table 5.2 shows the level of social support available by sex of adolescent.

TABLE 5.2

Number of Adolescents According to Social Support by Sex  
Time 2: Combined Family Groups.

	Boys	Girls	Total
Understanding confidante	21	23	44
Moderately understanding	10	5	15
No confidante	2	2	4
Total	33	30	63

A MANOVA was carried out with OSIQ total, NSQ depression and anxiety as outcome variables, age as covariate, and confidante, family structure and sex as factors. There are no significant main effects or interactions. Adolescent adjustment is not significantly associated with the presence of an understanding confidante in either family group.

Comment. The majority of the present sample is content with the quality of social support they can call on in time of trouble. As was the case three years before, levels of self-image, anxiety or depression do not appear to be linked to this variable.

#### **Within Groups Analysis: The Divorced Families At Time 2**

We now turn again to look more closely at factors associated with the divorced families only.

Hypothesis 19: Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 in divorced families will be related to the quality of the relationship with the custodial parent, but not to the sex of the parent or of the adolescent.

Under the Family Law Act (1975) custodial provision must be made only for children under the age of 18, so by 1985 half the sample is no longer subject to this requirement. Most adolescents, however, are still either living at home or are spending tertiary vacations at home. An analysis was therefore carried out to examine the quality of the relationship between the adolescent and the parent with whom he or she normally lives.

PBI care and overprotection ratings of custodial parents were entered as covariates (with adolescent age) in a MANOVA. Factors are sex of custodial parent and sex of adolescent. Outcome measures are OSIQ total and NSQ depression and anxiety scores. No significant relationships are found between adolescent adjustment and sex of custodial parent, parental PBI scores nor sex of adolescent. A trend (failing to meet the Bonferroni criterion) links age to univariate OSIQ total scores ( $F = 3.20$ ; d.f. = 3,18;  $p = .049$ ).

Comment. Although the earlier Time 2 analyses have shown that parent-child relations are still strongly associated with adolescent self-image in both family groups, the association between adjustment and the relationship with the custodial parent is no longer significant. Perhaps this is because older adolescents are more free to make their own living arrangements. Four have moved out of home, and seven have opted to live with their other parent since the last interview. It may also be that as their lives become full of interests and activities beyond the family in later adolescence they are less dependent on the parent with whom they live for emotional sustenance.

Hypothesis 20: Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 in divorced families will be associated with the way in which the divorce is experienced and perceived, specifically through current feelings, acceptance and perception of conflict change.

At Time 1 it was found that adolescent adjustment close to the time of the divorce was associated with the way in which the family separation was perceived and experienced. Parallel interview items were included at Time 2 and three similar, but not identical, scales were developed. It was found that some items were no longer relevant at Time 2, and in the interests of internal reliability these were omitted and some other items were included.

The items included in the Time 2 scales are listed below. Starred items are identical with or close in meaning to items in the corresponding Time 1 scales; all scales are keyed so that a positive response scores low.

TABLE 5.3

Time 2 Feelings, Acceptance and Perception of Conflict ChangeTime 2 Feelings: (alpha = .55) (all scored 1-4)

- \* Sad
- \* Shocked
- \* Can't believe it
- \* Upset at first
- \* Feel O.K. now

Time 2 Perception of Conflict Change. (alpha = .74) (items scored 1-3)

- \* Since the divorce has the level of conflict got worse, stayed the same, or got better?
- \* Overall do you think things have been better or worse in your family since the divorce?

How satisfying do you find the way you are spending your life these days?  
(remaining items scored 1-4)

How do you feel you are coping with your life at present?

How well do you think you were coping with your life at the last interview?

Time 2 Acceptance. (alpha = .62)

- \* Do you ever feel you would like your parents to get back together again? (scored 1 - 3).
- \* Relieved (scored 1-4)
- \* Glad (scored 1-4)

Despite the relatively low internal reliability of these scales, they are used because of interest in whether issues that are salient at Time 1 are still affecting adjustment at Time 2. The three scales were included (with age) in a MANOVA with Offer Self-Image total, NSQ depression and anxiety scales as outcome measures, and sex as a factor. There are no significant main effects although, in keeping with other Time 2 analyses, univariates indicate that older adolescents of both sexes have higher self-image scores ( $t = -3.6$ ;  $p = .002$ ), and tend to be less depressed ( $t = -2.2$ ;  $p = .04$ ).

A second MANOVA was then carried out using the OSIQ subscales as outcome variables to see whether the Time 2 divorce response variables affect specific aspects of adolescent self-image. This time the within cells regression is significant ( $F = 1.8$ ; d.f. = 52,41;  $p = .03$ ). Examination of the individual effects of the covariates, however, shows



that age exercises the most influence. Older adolescents, irrespective of sex, are more emotionally secure ( $t = -2.7$ ;  $p = .01$ ), have better body and self-image ( $t = -3.1$ ;  $p = .005$ ), and more satisfactory social ( $t = -2.5$ ;  $p = .02$ ), moral ( $t = -2.4$ ;  $p = .02$ ) and family relationships ( $t = -3.3$ ;  $p = .005$ ). They feel themselves to have greater mastery of the world ( $t = -3.3$ ;  $p = .003$ ), and their sexual attitudes are more mature ( $t = -2.9$ ;  $p = .008$ ). They also tend to be less depressed ( $t = -2.2$ ;  $p = .04$ ).

Of the divorce response variables, only two reach significance. Perception of conflict change is associated with mastery ( $t = 3.0$ ;  $p = .007$ ) and sexual attitudes ( $t = 2.8$ ;  $p = .01$ ), and acceptance with sexual attitudes ( $t = 3.14$ ;  $p = .005$ ).

Comment Although family climate and divorce acceptance are again associated with aspects of self-image, it seems that developmental factors now have more to do with adjustment than do factors specific to divorce. Age is associated with eight of the twelve scales at  $p < .05$ , with older age predicting better adjustment. Three years after the event the divorce itself seems to be fading in importance as adolescents gain in personal assurance and move into new spheres of life. The influence of age on adjustment echoes the result found for the combined sample at Time 2.

As before, perception of the family as experiencing less conflict is associated with better adjustment; and this time, scores on the sexual attitudes scale indicating greater acceptance of one's sexuality are associated with decreased family conflict and acceptance of the divorce.

Hypothesis 21: Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 in divorced families will be related to their global Divorce Response.

The items comprising the Time 1 divorce response scale (see Table 5.4) were included again at Time 2 ( $\alpha = .67$ ). A MANOVA was carried out with this scale and age as covariates, OSIQ total, NSQ depression and anxiety as outcomes, and sex as a factor. Age is significantly related to self-image ( $t = -3.7$ ;  $p = .001$ ) and depression ( $t = -2.9$ ;  $p = .007$ ), but divorce response is not linked to adjustment.

A further analysis using the OSIQ scales as outcome variables finds age (not divorce response) to be the strongest influence on specific aspects of self-image, with significant

relationships in eight out of eleven scales. In this analysis sex also reaches significance ( $F = 2.8$ ;  $d.f. = 11,15$ ;  $p = .03$ ). Family relations ( $F = 5.1$ ;  $d.f. = 1,25$ ;  $p = .03$ ) and superior adjustment ( $F = 4.1$ ;  $d.f. = 1,25$ ;  $p = .05$ ) are the aspects of self-image most affected, with boys scoring worse than girls on these scales.

The adolescents' current response to the three-year-old divorce is not related to measures of psychological adjustment. Profiles associated with a positive or negative response are then examined as before, by correlating divorce response scores with interview items from Time 2 and also with the OSIQ and Parent Bonding items. Because of the number of comparisons, only items correlating with a probability  $< .009$  are reported (Appendix 7, Table A7.1. lists the relevant interview items.)

As at Time 1, the adolescent who is strongly glad, not sad, accepts the separation, doesn't want a reconciliation, and is angry with one (or both) parent(s), has a negative view of the father. He or she believes that Dad doesn't understand my needs ( $r = .44$ ;  $p = .007$ ), doesn't let me make decisions ( $r = .43$ ;  $p = .008$ ), can't make me feel better when I'm sad ( $r = .45$ ;  $p = .006$ ), and doesn't talk with me ( $r = .47$ ;  $p = .005$ ). These adolescents give little of themselves to Dad ( $r = .63$ ;  $p = .000$ ), will handle their own children very differently ( $r = .54$ ;  $p = .001$ ), and it was their choice that relations with Dad have changed ( $r = .60$ ;  $p = .001$ ). There are few other correlates, but these suggest that mothers may have some trouble in handling adolescents high on this scale. This group is more likely to admit having infringed the law ( $r = .50$ ;  $p = .003$ ), and they have independence problems ( $r = .46$ ;  $p = .006$ ).

The finding of a greater degree of antisocial behaviour among this group is worrying but it has to be seen in the context of the total sample. On a measure of reported delinquency involving police contact there are no significant differences between those from intact and separated homes ( $X^2 = .40$ ;  $d.f. = 1$ ;  $p = .53$ . See Table 5.4.). The correlational pattern suggests that in the divorce group antisocial behaviour is more likely to be associated with those whose relationship with the father is most hostile, and who have been exposed to considerable pre-divorce family turbulence.

TABLE 5.4

Time 2: Percentage of Adolescents Reporting Involvement With Police  
By Family Group

	Intact Family		Divorced Family	
	n	%	n	%
Police involvement	6	17	8	27
No police involvement	29	83	22	73
	35	100	30	100

The reverse side of this pattern suggests that three years down the track, there are still some adolescents who have not reconciled themselves to the separation, and that these youngsters are especially close to their fathers.

These patterns resemble those found at Time 1, but again it is necessary to interpret them in the light of the frequency table below (Table 5.5). This shows that the majority of subjects are not expressing extreme emotions, and have accepted the separation, although there is still a residue of sadness and some anger.

TABLE 5.5  
Time 2 Divorce Response Items: Frequencies

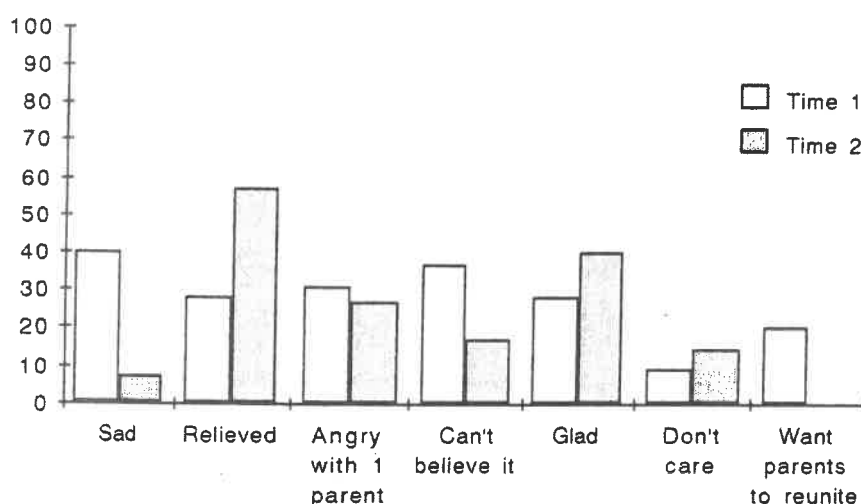
Item	Strongly		Fairly		A little		Not at all	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
* Sad	0	(0)	2	(7)	13	(43)	15	(50)
Relieved	8	(27)	9	(30)	6	(20)	7	(23)
Angry with one parent	3	(10)	5	(17)	3	(10)	19	(63)
Angry with both parents	0	(0)	1	(3)	8	(27)	21	(70)
* Can't believe it	0	(0)	5	(17)	3	(10)	22	(73)
Glad	7	(23)	5	(17)	7	(23)	11	(37)
Don't care	2	(7)	2	(7)	8	(27)	18	(60)
* Refuse to accept it	0	(0)	0	(0)	1	(3)	29	(97)
Accept decision	21	(70)	6	(20)	1	(3)	2	(7)
* Want parents to re-unite	0	(0)	0	(0)	8	(27)	22	(73)

\* Item reversed in scale to provide consistent keying.

Figure 5.5 below compares the proportions of those responding to common items at each time interval. The responses were dichotomised to distinguish between feelings about the divorce expressed strongly/fairly strongly and weakly (a little/not at all). It can be seen that negative feelings have diminished considerably since Time 1, although 27 per cent of the group still feel angry with one parent.

FIGURE 5.5

Time 1 and Time 2 percentage endorsing divorce response items  
very or fairly strongly



Comment. Although these results are generally positive, the failure to find a strong association between feelings about the divorce and self-image scores throws doubt on the accepted wisdom that a positive emotional response to divorce can be equated with - or at least indicates - good psychological adjustment, a view which Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) appear to hold. The present findings show that negative or positive feelings are not necessarily indicative of levels of adjustment, but appear to reflect appraisal of family relationships.

A second assumption about divorce response also comes into question. This is the view that adjustment should involve positive appraisal of both parents (see Kurdek and Berg, 1987). It was startling to find that those who were strongest in their acceptance of the divorce were still experiencing very negative feelings towards their fathers three years later. These feelings are associated with relief that the marriage is over, and may well be based on a realistic appraisal of conduct in the pre-divorce home. Conversely, the correlations show that those still feeling sadness and regret are most likely to feel warmly towards their fathers.

These results suggest that divorce adjustment among adolescents is complex and cannot be judged on the basis of positive feelings, or positive attitudes to parents without reference to the circumstances which have given rise to these responses.

Hypothesis 22: No differences according to sex or age at Time 2 are predicted for the above comparisons.

This hypothesis is only partially upheld. Very few sex differences have emerged from the analyses reported above, but an age effect runs through the Time 2 results. This is most marked for the Offer Self-Image measures, but there are also indications of lower depression scores among older adolescents. These results emerge in a particularly strong form in the analyses of divorced group teenagers, although they are also present in the combined data. Regression analyses confirm that age at Time 2 contributes to OSIQ total scores for the combined sample ( $F = 4.5$ ; d.f. = 1,61;  $p = .04$ ) and regressions performed on each family group separately indicate that this effect comes largely from the divorced group ( $F = 13$ ; d.f. = 1, 26;  $p = .001$ ). (Non-normality of standardised residuals when the divorced group is examined alone, however, suggests that this result should be treated with caution.) Age is negatively correlated with adjustment in each group, with older adolescents having lower (i.e. better) OSIQ scores, and younger subjects showing poorer adjustment. Mean scores for both family groups are within the normal range.

Comment. The indication that age may be more strongly related to adjustment among those from divorced families is of interest. Although there is no longer a significant group difference in mean age scores at Time 2 owing to correction of the difference introduced by the interviewing schedule at Time 1 (see Chapter 3), slightly greater variance in ages among the divorced group (s.d. = 1.02) compared to those from intact families (s.d. = .72) may have allowed a stronger developmental effect to emerge in the within group analysis. Alternatively, divorce may have had a polarising effect, hastening the maturity of older adolescents, but holding back the development of some of the younger ones. However, as already reported (Hypothesis 12) self-image scores do not indicate lower- or higher - adjustment for the divorced group than the intact group overall.

**Time 2 Model: Minimum Adequate Sub-Set Of Time 2 Variables**  
**Explaining Maximum Variance In Time 2 Adjustment Scores**

A Time 2 model was developed following the Aitkin procedure (Aitkin, 1974) described for Time 1. Selected Time 2 interview items were correlated with self-image scores. Elimination of those items with correlations at less than  $p = .009$ , produced only two new items (see Appendix 7, Table A7.2): worries about career ( $r = -.37$ ;  $p = .002$ ) and uncertainty about values ( $r = -.39$ ;  $p = .001$ ). Variables previously found to have a relationship with Time 2 OSIQ are age, current family conflict, current family happiness and the parent bonding scales. All these variables were included in the process of model-reduction.

As noted above there is some degree of intercorrelation among the PBI scales which is provided for by this procedure. (Table A5.6, Appendix 5 indicates that inter-correlations at Time 2 are very similar to those at Time 1.) The Aitkin method provides a conservative estimate of the minimum set of variables required. When fitted first all variables were significant at  $p = .008$  or better except age and conflict. Fitting the variables in successive analyses produced the following reduced model:

TABLE 5.6

Analysis of Variance Table

Reduced Model Explaining Variance In Offer Self-Image Scores  
At Time 2 With Time 2 Variables.

	SS	DF	MS	F	P
Within + residual	5.83	55	.11		
Current family happiness	1.35	1	1.35	12.72	.001
Father Overprotection	1.41	1	1.41	13.34	.001
Worry about career	1.05	1	1.05	9.89	.003
Model	3.81	3	1.27	11.98	.000
Total	9.64	58	.17		

R-squared = .40

Comment. Family structure does not contribute to the final model. All Time 2 parent bonding variables are highly significant when fitted first (mother care,  $p = .000$ ; mother overprotection,  $p = .000$ ; father care,  $p = .008$ ; father overprotection,  $p = .000$ ), indicating as before that each is associated independently with adolescent self-image. Elimination of three in the reduced model shows overlap between these variables and those remaining. The level of current family happiness probably summarises these influences, but it is interesting that father overprotection contributes to the variance in OSIQ total scores over and above this variable. Concern for independence and anxiety about job prospects are salient issues among these late-adolescent youngsters, and it is not surprising that these preoccupations are expressed in self-image scores.

### Time 2 Discussion

Three years after the divorce there is no evidence that adolescent adjustment is related to divorced or intact family structure: the only structural differences to emerge are a trend for the divorced group to be more advanced in their sexual attitudes and a somewhat stronger link between age and self-image among those from divorced families. The lack of significant difference in total self-image scores between the two family groups is in keeping with the majority of comparative studies of adolescent self-concept in divorce as discussed in Chapter 2.

Age has emerged as an important predictor of adjustment in both family groups. This is likely to be because of differences in experience between those who are still at school and those who are in tertiary education or are working. Social and sexual experiences are also likely to be age-differentiated in later adolescence. The evidence that age differences appear to be stronger among both boys and girls from divorced families, though tentative, is interesting. Interview data shows that the adolescents themselves believe that divorce hastens maturity but, as argued above, it may have a polarising effect, perhaps making it harder for some who were younger at divorce to separate from a single parent, while increasing opportunities for competence and self-determination in those who were older.

Kelly's (1981) account of adolescent psychosexual adjustment at the five-year follow-up of the Californian project describes all 18 subjects as falling into one or other of two



extreme positions - inability to form intimate relationships, or premature sexual activity with an unsatisfactory partner. Two-thirds reject the idea of ever marrying. These effects are interpreted as evidence of the negative effects of divorce on heterosexual adjustment although there is no means of testing this in the absence of a control group of adolescents from the same socio-cultural cohort.

In the present study no significant differences have been found between 16 to 19 year-olds from divorced and intact families on a measure of readiness for intimacy, nor in attitudes to marriage. There are some indications that among the divorced group attitudes are more sexually advanced and there may be a somewhat higher rate of sexual activity. These results give qualified support to the view that divorce may hasten readiness for sexual relationships. It is also true that some adolescents worry that their own marriages may fail, but the bleak picture presented by Kelly does not apply to the majority of the present sample. The interviews show that knowledge of the reality of marriage break-down is common to both groups, with 69 per cent of those from intact families reporting that they have at least one close friend whose parents have separated. This knowledge may bring with it a sense of caution about the future, perhaps a more realistic attitude than the romanticism of past cohorts.

A strong result from the cross-sectional analysis at Time 2 is the association found again between family processes and adolescent adjustment. Current happiness and conflict are again significant, but the factor that is most strongly related to adolescent self-image, in both family groups, is again the adolescent's relationship with his or her parents. Results indicate that where an adolescent has at least one parent perceived as caring and non-overprotective, self-image is robust, but lack of a high quality relationship with either parent is linked to poorer adjustment. Again these results support those studies discussed in previous chapters which draw attention to the ill-effects of family conflict and the part played in adjustment by the quality of parent-child relations. Again the link between poor self-image and parental over-protection has emerged, strongly supporting the results reported by Parker (1983) and demonstrating that in later adolescence, as before, the need for self-determination is a powerful factor.

Unlike the earlier result, no link between quality of relationship with custodial parent and adolescent adjustment is found at Time 2. The most likely explanation is that older adolescents are more free to make their own living arrangements if relations with the custodial parent are unsatisfactory, thus reducing the variance in this measure. A further factor is that older adolescents are capable of maintaining relationships despite geographical distance, so ties with the non-custodial parent can continue to provide support if this is lacking in the parent with whom the adolescent lives.

Few associations are found between adolescent adjustment and scales measuring current divorce-related feelings, acceptance or perception of conflict change, nor is there any association between global response to divorce and self-image. Adjustment is more strongly related to age than to divorce-specific variables. Half the sample still express some sadness about the separation. About a quarter have a lingering wish to see their parents reconciled, but 97 per cent have come to accept the divorce as a fact of life. These results suggest that divorce-related issues have become less salient over the intervening years. They support the results of Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky (1981) who report an increase in positive feelings about divorce among a non-clinical sample of eight to 17-year-olds over a two-year interval. Our longer term results again contrast with those of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) who found a marked decrease in unhappy feelings in the majority of their subjects at the 18 month interviews, but report a less happy picture at five years, with over a third of the children feeling very negative about their family situation.

Correlational analysis throws further light on the importance of the adolescent's relationship with the father, supporting research findings with younger children which emphasise the value of a continuing relationship following divorce - with the added proviso that the quality of that relationship is an important factor. (See also Amato, 1987; Feldman, and Feldman, 1975; Jacobson, 1978b; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980b.)

A final model was developed by bringing together all elements thought likely to contribute to adolescent adjustment, and seeking the minimum number necessary to explain the maximum variance in self-image scores. Family happiness, father overprotection and career worries together account for 40 per cent of this variance. The model shows that rather

than family structure, family processes and developmental concerns combine to contribute most to adolescent self-image .

The Time 2 analyses have shown that adolescent adjustment continues to be associated with the same family processes that were apparent at Time 1. Attitudes to the divorce have generally moderated with time, although feelings of sadness and regret are still associated with the adolescent's attitude towards the father. Among these 16 to 19-year-olds developmental issues are of great importance, and age has become a more important predictor of adjustment than three years previously.

The next set of analyses examines variables that predict adjustment from Time 1 to Time 2.

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## CHAPTER 6

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### RESULTS : PREDICTABILITY

In Chapter 1 it was argued that by their nature cross-sectional analyses provide a static view of the family and cannot examine time-related processes of change and development. Similarly, they cannot easily chart the continuities that exist, both in intact and divorcing families. A theoretical framework was suggested encompassing the relationship between adolescent adjustment and interactive family processes over time. In Chapter 3 a model was presented (see Figure 6.3 below) which proposed a bi-directional relationship between adolescent functioning and family processes at successive time intervals, with adjustment at Time 1 providing the basis for adjustment at Time 2. Predictions of vulnerability and resilience can thus be conceptualised in terms of both the nature of family processes and baseline levels of adjustment. The present chapter examines longitudinal findings in the light of these observations.

A longitudinal study provides the opportunity to ask two sorts of question. The first is simply, how have the adolescents fared over time? Are there differences between those whose parents divorced three years ago and those who stayed together? The cross-sectional analysis reported in the previous chapter has provided some of these answers. The second question concerns prediction. Are there any associations between factors present at the first interview and later levels of adjustment? are there any ways in which children who are especially vulnerable can be identified? An answer to these questions is foreshadowed in the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 23: Adolescent adjustment at Time 2 will be associated with Time 1 base-line adjustment scores and family process variables.

The first intention was to examine this issue by means of difference scores in Offer Self-Image. Somewhat surprisingly no significant differences were found between mean scores at Time 1 and Time 2 ( $t = .45$ ;  $d.f = 59$ ;  $p = .65$ ). There were of course individual

differences, and a weak negative correlation indicating an overall trend for lower (i.e. better) scores over time, but the differences could not be used as an outcome measure. (Figures 6.1 and 6.2 show mean outcome measures at each time interval by family group, with vertical axes reduced.)

FIGURE 6.1

Mean OSIQ scores at times 1 and 2 by family structure

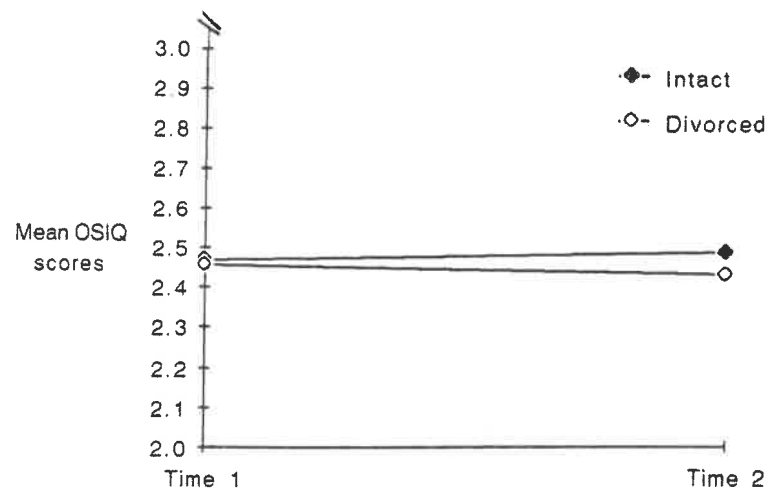
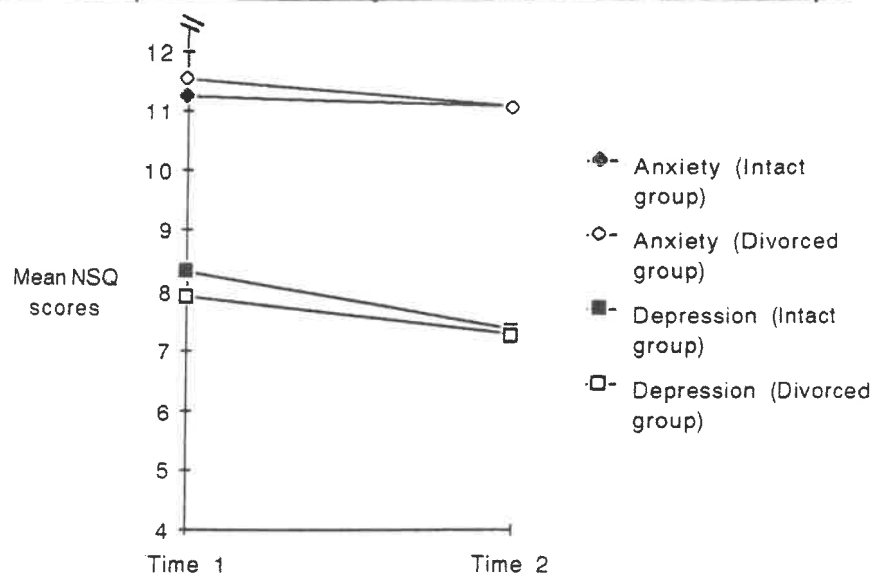


FIGURE 6.2

Mean NSQ Depression and Anxiety subscales at Times 1 and 2 total sample



The first step was to examine continuity over time. A MANOVA was carried out to examine the relationships between OSIQ total, NSQ depression and anxiety scores at the two time intervals. Time 2 scores were fitted as dependent variables with family structure and sex as factors, and age and Time 1 adjustment scores as covariates. The Within Cells Regression is highly significant ( $F = 7.1$ ; d.f. = 9,119;  $p = .000$ ). Offer total at Time 2 is related to all three Time 1 adjustment variables, though only OSIQ (T1) reaches the Bonferroni criterion for this analysis ( $t = 2.9$ ;  $p = .005$ ). The two depression scores are significantly related ( $t = 4.9$ ;  $p = .000$ ), as are the two anxiety scores ( $t = 3.2$ ;  $p = .002$ ). No other variables or interactions reach significance. Thus it was established that significant relationships exist between each outcome variable at both time intervals, and that these associations do not differ according to family group.

The continuity of the parent bonding scales was next examined by correlating scale scores for each time interval. Again a moderate to strong degree of continuity emerges for this measure of the adolescent's perception of their parents' interactions with themselves. All correlations are highly significant: mother care ( $r = .40$ ;  $p = .001$ ), mother overprotection ( $r = .43$ ;  $p = .000$ ), father care ( $r = .66$ ;  $p = .000$ ) and father overprotection ( $r = .57$ ;  $p = .000$ ).

Comment. It is clear from these results that adolescent scores have remained relatively stable over time, although, as one would expect, there is still considerable variance left unexplained.

Failure to find an overall time difference is surprising in the light of Time 2 findings that adjustment is better among older adolescents. Perhaps variability within the Time 2 sample cancels out a systematic effect across the two time intervals. Alternatively Time 2 age-related differences, though significant, may simply not be large enough to affect Time 1 - Time 2 comparisons. Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1981a, page 101) report few age differences in adolescent self-image and also cite similar results in Wylie (1974).

Nor do these results indicate a significant "recovery from crisis" effect for the divorced families, although Figures 6.1 and 6.2 indicate slight trends in the expected direction. Hess and Camara (1979) comment that for children the time when parents part has more psychological significance than the divorce itself. It may be that the mean time of 18 months

since parental separation at the first interview had allowed the majority of adolescents to cope with the most critical phase before the divorce took place.

On the basis of these results the OSIQ total score (T2) was adopted as the dependent variable in the following analyses.

### **Time 1 - 2 Predictive Model: Minimum Adequate Sub-set of Variables explaining Maximum Variance in Adjustment Scores.**

In order to examine the question of prediction in the fullest possible way an exploratory step was to correlate with Time 2 self-image scores a series of Time 1 variables judged to be relevant on the basis of prior research. These included economic indicators, parent adjustment scores, variables associated with divorce adjustment, factors associated with Time 1 adjustment scores, and baseline OSIQ total scores. Of these only conflict ( $r = .32$ ;  $p = .005$ ), mother care ( $r = -.35$ ;  $p = .003$ ), mother overprotection ( $r = .33$ ;  $p = .005$ ), father overprotection ( $r = .36$ ;  $p = .002$ ), and OSIQ total at Time 1 ( $r = .53$ ;  $p = .000$ ) were significantly correlated with adolescent adjustment scores at Time 2. Father care ( $r = -.23$ ;  $p = .04$ ) does not meet the criterion of  $p < .009$  adopted for these multiple comparisons.

The significant correlates were then included in a process of model-reduction with sex, age and family group, using OSIQ total at Time 2 as the outcome measure. The method used was that of Aitkin (1974), described in Chapters 4 and 5. As noted above this method allows examination of the relative contribution of inter-correlated variables, providing a parsimonious solution consisting of the minimum subset explaining the maximum variance.

When fitted first, the Time 1 variables mother care, father overprotection and conflict were each highly significant. A reduced model explains 22 per cent of the variance in Time 2 self-image scores by a combination of mother care ( $F = 7.25$ ;  $d.f. = 56,1$ ;  $p = .009$ ) father overprotection ( $F = 4.41$ ;  $d.f. = 56,1$ ;  $p = .04$ ) and age at Time 1 ( $F = 4.08$ ;  $d.f. = 56,1$ ;  $p = .048$ ).

When OSIQ total (T1) is included and placed first, however, the other variables become redundant ( $F = 23.14$ ;  $d.f. = 58,1$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Self-image alone at the first interview explains 29 per cent of the variance in OSIQ scores three years later.

Comment. These results demonstrate a significant degree of continuity in self-image over three years. The correlational analysis indicates that significant associations exist between perceived parent-child relations, conflict and happiness three years before and current self-image scores. Inclusion of base-line Offer scores swamps these effects. This is to be expected, as the Time 1 OSIQ scores may be seen as representing a package of factors including past family experiences and parent-child relationships.

This result is compatible with the model presented below in Figure 6.3 where the interaction of family processes and adolescent adjustment is depicted as providing the foundation for future adjustment. Consequently, while Time 1 self-image emerges as the strongest predictor of adolescent outcome at Time 2, the previous analysis shows that family process variables measured at Time 1 can also serve as alternative predictors.

### **Final Model: Minimum Adequate Sub-set of Time 1**

#### **Plus Time 2 Variables**

A final analysis examines the joint contribution of past and current factors. Repetition of the procedure described above with both Time 1 and Time 2 parent-child variables, family group and self-image at Time 1 produced a reduced model including one Time 1 variable - OSIQ baseline total - and one Time 2 variable - mother care - explaining 40 per cent of the variance in Time 2 adjustment scores. (See Table 6.1).

TABLE 6.1

#### Analysis of Variance Table

#### Reduced Model Explaining Variance In Offer Self-Image Scores At Time 2 Using Variables From Time 1 And Time 2.

	SS	DF	MS	F	SIG. F
Within + Residual	5.83	57	.10		
OSIQ Total (T1)	2.78	1	2.78	27.15	.000
Mother Care (T2)	1.13	1	1.13	11.06	.002
Model	3.91	2	1.96	19.11	.000
Total	9.75	59	.17		

R-squared = .40



Comment. With self-image scores for Time 1 included, mother care is the only Time 2 variable to add to the explained variance, although each of the Time 2 parent-bonding measures is highly significant when fitted first. Thus mother care may be seen as accounting for the common variance explained by these inter-correlated variables, and adding uniquely to it.

These results again demonstrate a high level of continuity in adolescent adjustment over three years. Forty per cent of explained variance is a considerable amount although there is still a fair proportion left to explain. No family structure effects are found, and the reliability of the Offer Self-Image scale is demonstrated.

The final model is best understood in the light of the analyses reported in Chapter 4. There we show that adolescent self-image at first interview is strongly linked to parent bonding variables. By including OSIQ (T1) total scores in the present equation we have, as already argued, included a summary of these influences, with other intrinsic factors. This measure explains by far the greater proportion of variance in adjustment scores three years later. We also find now that over and above this baseline measure the adolescent's current relationship with his or her mother contributes significantly to adjustment scores. Self-image appears to be - at least in part - a product of the inter-relationship of the adolescent with both parents, but the perceived level of the mother's warmth and acceptance in later adolescence adds to the variance explained.

Failure to find any family group differences is consistent with the previous analyses at both time intervals, and supports the initial thesis that family processes are of more significance to adolescent adjustment than divorced or intact family structure.

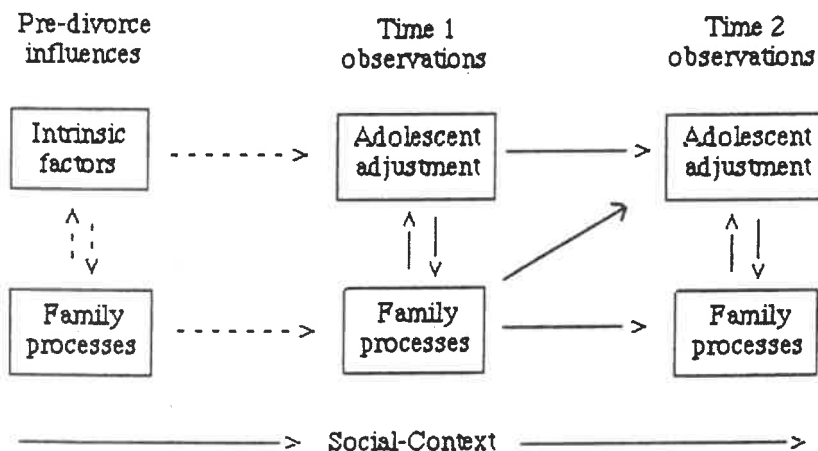
### **Predictive Results: Discussion**

It is increasingly recognized that children's response to divorce is the outcome of many interacting factors. It is therefore an achievement to be able to explain a considerable proportion of variance in self-image scores using core measures that have proved to be robust in cross-sectional analyses at two time intervals, and to show their predictive power over three years.

Why should it be that these family process variables are so strongly associated with self-image? As was indicated in Chapter 2 self-concept is used quite frequently in divorce research because it is a useful measure of psychological functioning, but the theoretical links between family processes and self-image are not pursued in this literature. In Chapter 3 a figure was presented conceptualising child development as an interactive process taking place within families which are themselves in process of change. Parent-child relationships are prior to and continue beyond divorce. Figure 6.3 replicates this figure, indicating the predictive pathways suggested by the above analyses.

FIGURE 6.3

Model of adolescent adjustment and family processes over time



This model proposes that adolescent self-image is the product of long-term interactions between parents and children. These take place within a wider social context and experiences beyond the family also contribute to self-image, but much developmental evidence supports the view that parent-child relationships are the substratum on which later relationships are built.

When parents divorce at adolescence children have had many years of interaction within the family. The self-image brought to divorce is already influenced by relationships built up over time. A risk factor at divorce is likely to be a poor self-image built up through unrewarding parent-child interactions. If an adolescent already feels unloved and rejected, divorce will be experienced as confirmation of a view of the self as unlovable and unworthy.

If, on the other hand, the child has a sense of self based on trust and the knowledge of being loved, divorce may be the dislocation of a known world, but the adolescent can bring personal resources to bear on this crisis. The continuity of relationships which sustain a sense of self-worth is clearly a most important element in such a situation.

Continuity in family processes and also in adjustment has been demonstrated in the analyses reported above. The redundancy of Time 1 parent-child scores when Time 1 self-image is included in the final analysis attests to the closeness of fit between these Time 1 variables. However the additional influence of later parent-child relationships is demonstrated by the increase in variance explained to 40 per cent in the final model when Time 2 parenting variables are represented.

When applying results derived from group analysis to individual cases care has to be taken to allow for individual family circumstances and intervening life events. With this waiver in mind, the results reported here could be used to identify those adolescents who are most at risk, providing a partial explanation of both vulnerability and resilience, and indicating modes of intervention.

In attempting to predict adjustment at Time 2, knowledge of self-image scores at Time 1 would provide the best information. But if the aim were intervention, knowledge of current family processes at either time could provide an opening, since their association with long-term adjustment has been established. Thus knowledge of an adolescent's perception of each parent in terms of care and overprotection, and his or her evaluation of the level of current family conflict could constitute information helpful to a counsellor working with a particular family.

It should be emphasised that the measures used in these analyses have examined the relationship between self-image and the adolescent's own view of family interactions. In Chapter 1 it was argued that use of adolescent-derived measures is consistent with the theoretical framework used in this study which stresses the child's perception of self and family. The question of whether adolescents' perceptions of their parents' behaviour towards them are veridical cannot be answered, although it seems reasonable to assume that their ratings express real current family interactions. It is interesting, therefore, to note that

other studies of younger children using parent-derived measures have reached conclusions which support the present findings.

One of the few studies setting out to examine prediction of divorce adjustment is that of Kurdek (1987). His study of 20 ten-year-olds and their mothers reveals significant correlations between a series of factors present a year after separation and measures of child adjustment one year later. These include parenting variables and characteristics intrinsic to the child. The similarity between these results for younger children and our longer term results for adolescents is exciting. Guidubaldi et al (1986), examining primary school children's divorce response, also found links between parent-derived measures of parent-child relationships at first interview, and measures of adjustment two years later.

The best known longitudinal study of children in divorce is that of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b). They report difficulty in predicting future adjustment from reactions at separation, remarking that at the five-year follow-up few children and adolescents held to their original clinical assessment although older subjects showed most stability. Two thirds of those coping well at the first round of interviews continued to do well, while those who had experienced high pre-divorce stress had improved. The least predictable were those initially assessed as in the middle range of adjustment. As noted in Chapter 2, it is not clear how close to the initial separation these families were at first interview. For the present sample the Time 2 interview occurred three years after divorce, and an average of four and a half years following parental separation.

As reported in Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) only 12 of their adolescent sample (three boys and nine girls) were re-interviewed at the five-year follow-up. The authors note that among both adolescents and children, current factors were the strongest determinants of outcome. Key contributors to adjustment were the level of present parental conflict and the current relationship of the child with the custodial (and non-custodial) parents. They also note the importance of intrinsic personality factors brought by the child to the divorce, including "the child's history within the pre-divorce family and the capacity to make use of his or her resources within the present..." (page 207).

The lack of continuity between assessments may be related to methodological issues already discussed in connection with this study (see Chapter 2). It may be that

psychodynamic clinical assessment tends to amplify current emotional response at the expense of more stable indicators of adjustment. Although the study is weak in predictive power, it supports the present results in identifying factors which the present study has now shown by use of standard measures to be linked with good coping at each time interval.

We have been able to take this further by demonstrating continuity and predictability over three years, and by putting forward an explanatory model that proposes a partial account for vulnerability and resilience in children of divorce.

In the following section the findings from the three results chapters are brought together in a brief summary to provide the reader with an overview of the findings.

### **Summary of Findings**

The analyses presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 have supported the thesis that adolescent adjustment at divorce and three years later is associated with processes within the family rather than divorced or intact family structure.

We have found no evidence to support the view that those from divorced families, as a group, have poorer self-image scores or that they are regarded as functioning less well by their parents. On the other hand we have repeatedly shown that high self-image in both family groups is associated with perceived levels of current family happiness, low conflict and relationships with parents characterized by warmth and independence.

At Time 1 there was some support for an association between parent measures of psychopathology and adolescent adjustment, but no link between adjustment and social support. Age was not related to adjustment when the adolescents were 13 to 16, but a psychosocial gap between 16 to 19-year-olds at Time 2 was evident, with some indication that this may be more pronounced among those from divorced families. Sex differences were few, although there is a trend for adolescent girls from both family groups to be somewhat more anxious than boys. Contrary to research with younger subjects there is little evidence that these adolescent boys are affected more adversely by divorce. Although at Time 1 their depression scores are somewhat higher than other subjects they are within normal limits, and self-image scores show no difference. No significant group differences

were found in readiness for intimacy or in attitudes to marriage, although there were some indications that those from the divorced group were rather more sexually active at Time 2.

The importance to adolescents of the quality of their relationships with parents again stands out when we look at the divorce group alone. Adjustment is related to the quality of the relationship with the custodial parent rather than to the sex of the child or whether custody is vested in the mother or the father. Similarly, the level of conflict in the post-divorce family predicts self-image, with better scores among those who report improvement in family conflict and happiness levels.

The longitudinal nature of this research has enabled us to chart continuity as well as disruption, and to focus on aspects of adolescent development cross-cutting family structure. The vulnerable adolescent has been shown to be one who comes to the post-divorce family with an impoverished relationship with both parents and who reports high levels of continuing family conflict. Low self-concept at the time of the divorce is a risk factor predicting the probability of poor self-concept three years later. Conversely the resilient adolescent is one with a high self-image at divorce. These adolescents report low post-divorce conflict and enjoy a good relationship with at least one parent.

In the next chapter four case histories are presented to illustrate how these group results are expressed in the context of individual lives, and the nature of parent-child relationships at adolescence is examined through interview responses.

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## CHAPTER 7

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### DIVORCE AT ADOLESCENCE : CASE HISTORIES AND INTERVIEW MATERIAL EXEMPLIFYING THE FINDINGS

Divorce happens to couples rather than samples. Group results tell us about statistical probabilities, but the way things work out for the individual adolescent is what is of ultimate concern to parents and those working in this field. People want to know what the risk factors are, and how to find ways of minimising hurt for children.

The results reported in previous chapters have shown patterns in the data indicating risk and protection factors for adolescents. The present chapter translates these group results into personal experience, examining how these factors interact in people's lives. Firstly, four case histories are briefly presented and issues arising from them are discussed. Then the link between parent-child relationships and adolescent development is examined from the perspective of interview responses.

The case-history information is derived from parents' and adolescents' interviews and the chapter is linked to the previous results in that selection of cases is based on adjustment scores. Two adolescents of each sex whose self-image scores at first interview are one standard deviation above or below the norm have been chosen. (A full table of scores for the selected families is included in Appendix 8, Table A8.1). Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

#### **Richard**

##### Time 1

Richard, the youngest of four brothers, was 16 when interviewed close to the date of his parents' divorce. His total self-image score (1.75) was well below the norm (i.e. better than the Australian average as reported by Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1977), although his NSQ depression and anxiety scores were high. Overprotection scores for each parent were

unusually low (i.e. good); mother care (33) was high (good) but father care (13) was well below the norm.

Richard said he felt sad, angry and shocked in waves when he first heard from his mother and older brother of the impending separation two years previously. He was now relieved that the divorce was final and was strongly convinced that it was the right decision. His parents, both professionals, had been through a series of separations and reconciliations over the two year period following his mother's discovery of an extra-marital relationship. Both parents went through a period of intense anguish, which spilled over into angry confrontations. Because of the stress, the father's tolerance of teenage noise and loud music was low. His somewhat authoritarian stance provoked conflict between the parents about the boys, and tension between the adolescents and their father. Richard talks of "the indecision and endless waiting" and "the big bubble of tension" in the family before the decision to divorce was finally taken.

His mother, normally a competent and strong woman, experienced a reactive depression at the time of the first separation. She describes Richard's response at that time as "grief-stricken, a classical text-book bereavement reaction". An exceptionally gifted student, his school attendance became erratic and his class position dropped from dux to sixteenth. These reactions diminished following the final separation, and by the first interview his school performance was back to its previous level.

Richard attended an independent church school and church-going had been a regular part of life, important to both parents in this upper middle class family. He had been a practising Anglican until the family crisis.

The crisis precipitated what Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) call "de-idealisation" of the father. Richard comments, "After the way he's treated my mother he commands little respect". Relations with his mother became closer following the separation. He sees her as someone who "fulfils all the requirements of a mother, but yet is a friend . . . we have mutual respect. We depend on each other and help each other through". He regrets his father's inability to communicate, "I wished he would have explained his position to us - it would have been better for him and for us. Now I value his advice and opinions so little it doesn't worry me that we don't talk".



Richard's need for explanation in order to be able to understand and cope with the divorce comes through in his response to the interview question, "If you knew a family that was going to separate what advice would you give to the parents?"

"I'd tell them to tell the teenager everything and don't hide things even if it is hard at the time. Also they should get things moving more quickly - if they want to separate, make up their mind and do it. If they want to get together, work hard at it. The waiting and hoping is not useful."

To other teenagers he says,

"Try to support the parents and try not to influence them - help them to overcome the sadness of separation if that's the decision, or help them to re-build if that's what they want. Kids should try to understand what is happening so they can avoid this happening in their own relationships - if they understand the distress they won't let this happen easily in their own marriages".

Richard feels that the crisis brought the brothers closer together, although each reacted differently. The oldest was overseas but kept closely in touch. The next in age remained closer to the father than the two younger boys. But the family has continued to act as a family, providing support for one another during the drawn-out period of change.

## Time 2

Three years later Richard's self-image score (1.95) is still better than the norm; depression is low and anxiety within the normal range. Overprotection scores for both parents are low, mother care (30) is still high and father care (28) has now risen markedly.

Richard seems to be coping well. He obtained an excellent pass in the Higher School Certificate and is now living at a university college. He sees his home base as with his mother and brother in the terrace house where they have lived since the sale of the large family home. He values his independence, relying less for support from his family than before. He is immersed in university life, with a good circle of friends and a course he thoroughly enjoys. Music is very important to him.

The most striking change since the previous interview is the improvement in his relationship with his father. He comments sadly about the loss of contact with his father

between the ages of 15 and 18. Now he sees his father as, "... highly respected, intelligent, hard-working, yet caring, supportive and interested in me." However he also acknowledges there is "... a bit of a generation gap. He is sweet and kind but never open with communication - will allude to things, but never directly." In a more light-hearted vein he remarks, "Dad is unbearable, self-centred, pedantic, very lovable, hopeless to live with, grumpy moods - can't take him seriously - mournful, poverty-stricken," and later he acknowledges, "I don't really want to emulate him too much. I'm working hard to accept him as he is now, wouldn't want to be like him."

He values his relationship with his mother highly. It is still close and open, but a little more distant than before. He attributes this mainly to developmental change, but acknowledges that the divorce may also have played a part. Sometimes he finds their open communication too emotionally overpowering. If he has children he will bring them up much as she has done, but will "give them more rope, allowing them to come to me rather than demanding information". He comments that he now gets on well with his father's partner whom he used to detest and he wonders if maybe he "was brain-washed by my mother". He is concerned about his mother, and feels she has not completely recovered from the divorce.

Richard has a girl-friend who is "very special", but he's not sure whether he will ever want to marry. He sees a de facto relationship as the only sensible option: marriage would only be to legitimate children. He's not sure whether his parents' split has affected his relationship with girls. He sees himself as quite reserved, not one to jump into things too quickly. Looking back on the divorce he feels it has caused him to be more aware of how he may affect other people. "I empathise to a degree which would never have occurred to me before." If he does have children he will try to take a middle course between his parents, "I would show more emotion, take more interest. Medium between being too demanding and my father's reserve."

### Comment

It has been pointed out that for most subjects some recovery from the crisis of separation is likely to have taken place before the first interviews which took place close to

the divorce and - on average- eighteen months since final separation. Richard's experience bears this out. For him the initial news and the period of tension and conflict leading up to the decision to part were by far the worst times. We do not know what his adjustment scores were then, but the description of his school response suggests a high degree of stress. Following resolution of this crisis he was able to return to a normal school life, and although there is evidence at the first interview of continuing anxiety and depression, his self-image scores are among the best in the total sample.

Richard has been supported through the family crisis by a close and non-overprotective relationship with his mother, who provided warning and explanation about the separation. His sad and angry feelings about the break-up are largely directed at his father. At Time 1 he is frustrated by his father's unwillingness to explain his position and feels he treats him as child, too young to understand. He cannot get through to his father as a person, and is disillusioned about him as an idealised father-figure.

His advice to others experiencing divorce demonstrates the cognitive strengths - and associated needs - of adolescence. They exemplify the need for explanation in order to find meaning in a crisis, and the capacity to place oneself in a third-person position, dissociating one's own wishes from the need to support parents in their decision to dismantle or re-build their relationship.

From the statistical analyses we would predict that Richard's adjustment at Time 2 would be good, on the basis of his initially good scores, the nature of his relationship with his mother, and the reduction of family conflict. This is supported. But at the first interview Richard was whole-heartedly on his mother's side, and a totally one-sided allegiance carries the risk that black and white judgements may be carried into future relationships, or that an adolescent may find it hard to differentiate from a parent. It is therefore interesting that by the second interview Richard's relationship with his father has greatly improved. He is able to view his parents in a more detached light, acknowledging strengths and weaknesses in each, and maintaining a relationship with both. He is awake to his father's flaws, but is working on accepting him as he is. He is also aware of the need to distance himself to some degree from his mother.

Richard's self-image is exceptionally good and he is leading a successful and satisfying life. He has no desire for his parents to re-unite and believes the divorce was right, but he still feels some sadness, anger and a sense of disbelief when he looks back. He is less sure about marrying than he was three years ago and, despite a good relationship with his girl-friend, feels the divorce may have made him more tentative with girls. But he also feels it has given him a greater realisation of the importance of honesty, loyalty and communication in relationships. Though the divorce has left its mark, it has not undermined Richard's basic psychological strength and he feels that through his experience he has gained in maturity and understanding.

### Mark

#### Time 1

Mark has not come through the experience of divorce as well as Richard. There are parallels between the two families but also some striking differences. Mark, 15, is the youngest of a family of four boys and one girl. His self-image score (2.95) is poor, being a standard deviation worse than the norm, and his depression and anxiety scores are at high levels. His mother, with whom he lives, scores low in care (23), and comparatively high in overprotection (13); his father's care score is normal and his overprotection is low.

Mark's mother has a history of psychological problems and her NSQ total score puts her above the clinical cut-off point. A strict Catholic, she disapproves of divorce and feels highly indignant that the law permits her marriage to be terminated after a year's separation without her consent. She still hopes for a reconciliation although the divorce has been finalised. Mark lives with his mother and an aggressive 18-year-old brother, who constantly challenges his mother's authority. Mark and his mother both describe the frequent fighting and high tension in the home. Mark comments,

"Patrick and Mum have a personality clash. He says 'No wonder Dad left you!' and Mum doesn't like that. They go on and on at each other. 'Yabber, yabber, yabber. Why did you do that?' He didn't put a hole in her - but he put one in the wall! "

Mark's father seems to have been a marginal member of the family for some time. Although his mother angrily protests that her sons need their father, she also comments that he had left their up-bringing mainly to "the nuns, brothers and me". His job had taken him away from home for long periods, and he intervened little when he was at home. Now, according to his own interview, he does not see himself as a member of the family at all, although he visits his sons each week.

Mark's father was depressed and anxious when the separation took place and describes himself as "devastated - it was my decision but it was still hard to go through". He had been extremely dissatisfied with the marriage for fifteen years, and sees it as "having sunk to a low level of indifference". There was "steely pressure" on him to become Catholic, with no trust or empathy from his wife. There is no question of reconciliation.

In detaching himself from the marriage he also seems to have withdrawn emotionally from his children. He sees the oldest son as "unstable from a temperamental point of view"; he and his daughter are alienated, and his remarks about Mark are cool and somewhat disparaging. He seems unaware of the problems surrounding Patrick and the emotionally volatile atmosphere in the home.

Mark's school performance has dropped well below his capacity. He likes maths and hopes to be an engineer, but will need to improve his grades. He has no-one he can talk to at his church school about his family problems,

"I've kept it mainly to myself. Some kids in the form are so rotten they'd rip you to pieces on it. You survive and go on with life. You're the same person, a little bit wiser. There's not much anyone can do for you."

He is angry that no-one prepared him for the separation: "I was kept in the dark, which I didn't like. Then Dad said, 'I'm just moving out for a while to have a rest.' A week after I realised it was going to take a year to settle - or a couple of years - or never."

He would like his parents to re-unite and thinks there is a fifty/fifty chance, but he also believes it was right for them to separate: "They couldn't go on like that - null and void - yes, we're here because the rest of the world says we're supposed to be here."

He misses his father, describing him as "quiet, good-tempered, knowledgeable, straightforward", but finds it very hard to communicate with him. "He's silent - when we

do talk it's when we've been together for a long time like in the car. If we drive down to Port Kembla we might talk about three times on the way."

He feels the divorce has affected his relationship with both parents: "Before I always looked up to my mother and father as infallible, now you find they're normal human beings. My big brother was disappointed to find Dad wasn't perfect - I've found out much younger."

When Mark was younger his parents had worried that he was "introverted" and a "dreamer". His response to the divorce has been to immerse himself in the imaginary world of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1966), and the fantasy role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*. He talks about this game with extraordinary intensity and concreteness, and describes his parents in terms used in the game, "Mum is 'chaotic', and Dad is 'lawful'."

His advice to other parents on how to help their children is, "Tell them everything before it happens. Whatever you do don't start raving and screaming. Keep away from each other rather than that." And to children he says, "Don't take sides."

## Time 2

Three years later Mark's self-image score (2.78) is still above the norm, but depression and anxiety scores are now normal. Care scores show little difference, but mother's overprotection is 3.5 units above the norm.

He and his brother are still living with their mother in the family home. Mark, now 17, left school at the end of Year 11. His hopes of becoming an engineer have faded and he is currently looking for an apprenticeship or other work in the building industry. Mark has accepted the divorce, although he still has a lingering wish for his parents to re-unite. He feels his mother needs support and worries about what will become of her when he leaves home. There is still a very high level of conflict focussed on his brother whom he describes as "unstable, not a happy person at all, sometimes violent". He remarks, "I wouldn't cry much if Patrick had his funeral," repeating this comment as if to convey the intensity of his feelings about the abuse received from this older brother.

Mark's view of the world seems bleak. He has never had a girl-friend and worries about whether a girl would find him attractive or boring. He mentions death in different

contexts a number of times during the interview, talks unhappily about his schooldays and speaks coldly of his friends,

"I know what my friends are like. I know that on a personal basis they're capable of being very cold and callous - ignore that and everything goes along smoothly. Even if they like you they can be like that."

He sees his relationship with his mother as having changed as he has matured. He describes her as "a stubborn and petty yet loving woman." He will handle his own children much as she has handled him but disapproves of her tendency "to bribe and swindle" which he attributes to the fact that "she grew up in a shop". He feels his relationship with his father has improved. "I didn't see much of him when he first moved out - I see more of him now." He describes him as "a stubborn, brave man who is annoying sometimes." Mark will try to spend more time with his own children than his father has with him, and will be strict with them when they are young, giving them more freedom as they get older.

Fantasy role-playing games are still Mark's main interest. He speaks of having built up three complex roles in *Dungeons and Dragons* over the past four years, and also of playing war games such as *Empires and Armies*. He seems to have little social life apart from his interactions with the boys with whom he plays these games.

### Comment

It is clear that the difficulties in Mark's family go back many years. His father's dissatisfaction with his marriage dates from about the time of Mark's birth, and his mother had a major breakdown when he was five. His low self-image at the first interview should be seen in the context of these long-term family processes as well as its current crisis. Mark is not particularly close to either parent, and his mother's parenting scores place her in Parker's "affectionless control" category.

Whereas Richard had been able to start to restructure his life once his parents finally decided to part, no resolution was possible for Mark because of his mother's refusal to accept the finality of the divorce. The chaotic and unhappy atmosphere and escalating conflict with Patrick provided evidence for her that the boys needed their father, and fuelled her moral indignation. The family conflict was, in a sense, sustained by her stance. The

only escape from this deadlock for Mark was a retreat into the fantasy world of Tolkien and of role-playing games in which forces of good and evil fight it out in a safely distant arena.

At the second interview little seems to have changed, although his depression and anxiety scores have improved. He clings to the relationship with his emotionally inaccessible father, although he comments, "one can easily forget loved ones in this family unless they are around all the time". His self-image is still poor, and his bleak view of the world is worrying.

## **Ruth**

### Time 1

Ruth, an only child, was 15 at the first interview. She had an exceptionally good self-image score (1.83) and her depression and anxiety scores were low. Her mother was high in care and low in overprotection. Her parents both worked at a meat-works, her mother as a leading hand on a processing floor, and her father as a slaughterman. Ruth knew that things were bad between her parents. Her father drank excessively and her mother moved to a single bed in another room and used to cry herself to sleep.

Ruth was upset when the separation first took place. She truanted from school and ran away from home - although this only lasted a few hours. She was in with a group of fairly wild school-friends and had to fill out a report for the police when one of them received a stab-wound in a fight.

A counsellor helped her: "She calmed me down, explained things - I told her a lot - she made me realise I wasn't the only upset one - asked me if I'd talked to my parents and said I should."

Ruth's mother was also able to help: "Teenagers must have one adult they get on good with - should get really close - with my Mum we're more best friends than mother and daughter."

Ruth's biggest change is the reduction in family finances. Before the divorce all three took turns each week in buying clothes, now she has to save to buy things or go out. But she also sees the family as much happier than before. She can have friends over without her mother being upset or her father getting angry. She goes over to his place once a week to



pick up the maintenance cheque, and although they are not very close she speaks warmly of her father,

"His nerves are bad and he can't take responsibility. I don't hold any grudges against him, or against Mum. He is gentle, quiet and considerate, different to what a lot of Dads are - a lot of men after they separate from their wives and kids they don't ring up and that - but Dad does."

She and her mother enjoy a close, communicative relationship, "Mum's lovely - a friendly warm person - best Mum anyone could be."

To another couple about to separate she advises, "Explain it to the children and make sure they understand. Don't decide for them - let them decide who they want to go with." Her advice to children is, "To sort of put themselves in their parents' position and see what they'd think and do."

## Time 2

Three years' later - now 18 - Ruth's self-image score is normal but her anxiety has increased. She left school at 16 against her mother's advice, and now has some regrets that she did not stay on to complete her Higher School Certificate. She is doing well in her job and hopes to become manager of the cookie shop where she works by the end of the year.

Since the last interview a number of things have happened in her life. She had a hurtful love affair with a man who went off and married someone else. She was in a car accident and was accused by the police of drinking and driving under age because they found her slumped in the driver's seat after the driver had run away. Her mother turned up and intervened and she was not charged. There have been deaths among family and friends, and one friend is in a wheel-chair following a car crash.

She still has a close relationship with her mother seeing her as, "My best friend, lovable, caring and understanding; a lot of the time I think she's my guardian angel." They share a lot of interests and activities, "Reading, football, dancing and going out and having fun. Also playing the 'pokies' and spending money - that would be the worst!"

Both parents are seen as exceptionally caring and non-overprotective. Her contact with her father has increased and she communicates with him better than before. She is grateful

that her mother has brought her up to see that although they are divorced Ruth has not divorced her father - it's up to her to keep in touch.

Ruth has a steady boy-friend. She wants to marry some day, but not until after she turns 21. She looks forward to having a family and is optimistic about marriage, believing that if you have a good open relationship and a strong friendship with your partner you should be right. She would live together first to find out if it worked. She also warns that sometimes teenagers may turn to someone of the opposite sex when their parents' marriage breaks up, and that this can be dangerous and hurtful.

### Comment

Ruth's case illustrates how a warm and supportive parent can provide a life-line through risky times. Ruth's reaction to the separation, combined with peer group influence, might have led to disaster but she seems to have come through this phase in her life with increased maturity. She has a close relationship with a parent whom she can rely upon and her self-image is robust. At the second interview Ruth is leading a happy active life, but her anxiety has increased. It seems that a series of life events since the divorce may have contributed to her anxiety level. Her warning against turning to someone of the opposite sex when parents part seems to be an oblique reference to her own unhappy affair. Ruth comments that her mother had the responsibility of bringing her up "when I went through the difficult age - 13 to 17", and she also remarks that she would not allow her own children to leave school as early as she had. Perhaps things might have been different if her father had maintained a stronger presence in her life, backing up his wife's opposition to her wish to leave school and get a job, but he had clearly become a marginal member of the family well before the marriage ended.

## **Felicity**

### Time 1

Under the Family Law Act, a couple is permitted to reside in the same house, provided they do not co-habit, during the mandatory 12-month separation period before a divorce can be granted. When first interviewed Felicity, 14, and her 11-year-old brother had been living

with parents "separated under the same roof" for the previous year in an atmosphere of mounting hostility. Felicity's mother had been aware of problems in the marriage for eight years; her father had been taken by surprise by the separation. Neither wanted to move out of the house and the question of custody was unresolved although the divorce was close. Felicity's self-image score (3.16) was over a standard deviation above the norm and her anxiety was excessively high.

Her father was away when her mother re-arranged the furniture to provide for separate living. She comments, "In a way I thought it was better because I thought the fighting would stop but they're still fighting because they're still under the same roof . . . about petty things like the dish-washing liquid."

She describes the atmosphere of conflict that seems to pervade the whole family, "Tom and I have become more apart, more angry with each other. I think we've taken over the same role without realising it. It's terrible. I don't like it. Mum tries to get us to see her side of the story, and Dad tries to get us to see his. It's not an objective point of view any more. I just figure it out myself."

The family problems spill over into other areas of life and Felicity sees her main problem as "Keeping everything on an even level and everyone not fighting as much, keeping calm so we can get on with what we're doing - not doing badly at school or work because you're worried about things at home."

Felicity tries not to take sides. Neither parent is seen as overprotective, and although she has a closer relationship with her mother she also sees her father as a caring person. She feels the separation has brought increased understanding of her parents,

"It's helped me see Mum separately in a new light and Dad separately in a better light. Mum's pretty much the same, only more independent. It's helped bring me closer to Dad, though it would be better if I saw him more. Dad's worried and, in a way, scared of losing Tom and me. I think he's afraid of being unwelcome as a father."

She feels the separation has made her grow up more quickly because it has made her think about the future more: "I worry about that in a way. I don't want my marriage to break down. I don't think about it much, but I do think about it."

Her advice to parents about to separate is unambiguous, "Don't live under one roof. And try to see as much of the children equally as you can." To the children she says, "Try to understand what's going on, because it will probably benefit you eventually."

### Time 2

Three years later Felicity, now almost 17, is living in a new home with her mother and brother. Her self-image scores are within the normal range, although anxiety is still high. She is happy at school and is studying hard to obtain entry to a University communications course. She comments that things are better than they were because "the atmosphere at home is really important for school-work".

Looking back she comments that it had been harder than expected to adjust to the final separation. Two months after the divorce the family was still under the same roof. Finally her mother had moved out, and she had lived with her father for six months. She had then chosen to live with her mother, a hard choice as "there were so many people's feelings involved." Since then she has seen less of her father, "but when I do see Dad I'm closer - so in a sense the contact has increased - in quality though not in quantity."

Felicity now sees her father as more caring than three years before, but also more overprotective; her mother's care score has dropped five units. There is still a certain amount of tension in the family. She and Tom fight and she feels her mother takes his side. She sticks up for her father when her mother criticises him. She writes of her mother:

"She is kind, honest and generous. She is funny and we are quite close . . . we have a sort of friend/mother relationship. However, I resent her going out as much as she does. I have tried to make her understand (that) if she didn't go out as much and we spent more time together there would be greater understanding and friendship."

Felicity expects to marry some day. Marriage attracts her for "a steady relationship, security, a nice home, a nice atmosphere - maybe." She feels that living together before marriage to test a relationship is sensible.

### Comment

Felicity's experience illustrates the tension and pain for an adolescent of living in an atmosphere of high conflict, and of finding oneself caught between two warring parents.

Her strategy of even-handedness is hard to sustain when claims for loyalty are made by both sides. Her realisation that parental conflict has spilled over into her relationship with her brother is insightful, as is the comment that problems at home affect school adjustment. Felicity, however, has assets that Mark lacks in that she has the advantage of two parents seen as caring and non-overprotective. It was predictable that once the high tension engendered by continuing to live under the same roof was relieved her self-image would adjust to better levels.

By the second interview things have settled down to some extent, but the final separation is still recent compared with those families where both parents accepted the separation and lived apart for a full year or more before divorce. Felicity's self-image has improved and she has picked up her school agenda well, but her anxiety levels are still high, and worry about her own future marriage is evident. The prolonged and escalating stress of living together but apart seems to have left a residue and the family still has some way to go in adjusting to the new structure.

### **Discussion**

We cannot predict individual outcomes from group results with certainty, but the case histories illustrate that the patterns described in earlier chapters are meaningful. Risk and protection factors observed at Time 1 do translate into longer term adjustment. The case histories illustrate the ways in which factors interrelate in individual lives. Circumstances differ, and factors may combine to strengthen or weaken predicted outcomes. The present discussion seeks to draw together the statistical analyses and the case history material. In all four cases certain themes emerge which are also present, to a greater or lesser degree, in the experience of the other subjects.

#### The Temporal Dimension

In each individual case it is possible to observe the time-related nature of family processes, family restructuring, and adolescent adjustment. In Richard's family the decision to part had taken two years of indecision, and his father's infidelity had preceded this by a considerable time. Felicity's mother had known eight years earlier that her marriage would

have to end, and Mark's father had been unhappy for 15 years. Awareness of the lead-in to these divorces underpins the need to see families as systems in transition over time.

Just as the origins of the marriage break-down reach back across years, so processes of recovery and adjustment also take place over time. In the cases outlined above it seems that once the decision to part is taken and accepted by both partners, the process of restructuring can begin. But while parents remain under the same roof, or if a parent clings to an unrealistic hope of reconciliation, the family remains in a state of prolonged crisis. For adolescents there is evidence of shock, sadness, anger and interference with school performance when the family crisis is at its height, but as the family stabilises these reactions diminish. A happier home with reduced conflict allows a child to move back into normal adolescent activities, while failure to reach resolution means the child pays a price in continuing stress and poor self-image.

### Prediction

Self-Image Scores. From the analyses presented in Chapter 6 it would be expected that level of self-image at first interview would predict self-image at Time 2. There is some regression towards the mean in each of the four subjects, chosen for their exceptionally good or poor scores at Time 1, but taking the normative mean as a criterion, none has reversed his or her position (see Figures 7.1 and 7.2). Knowledge of these adolescents' scores at Time 1 does provide a basis for judging future self-image, though clearly intervening life events also exercise an influence.

FIGURE 7.1

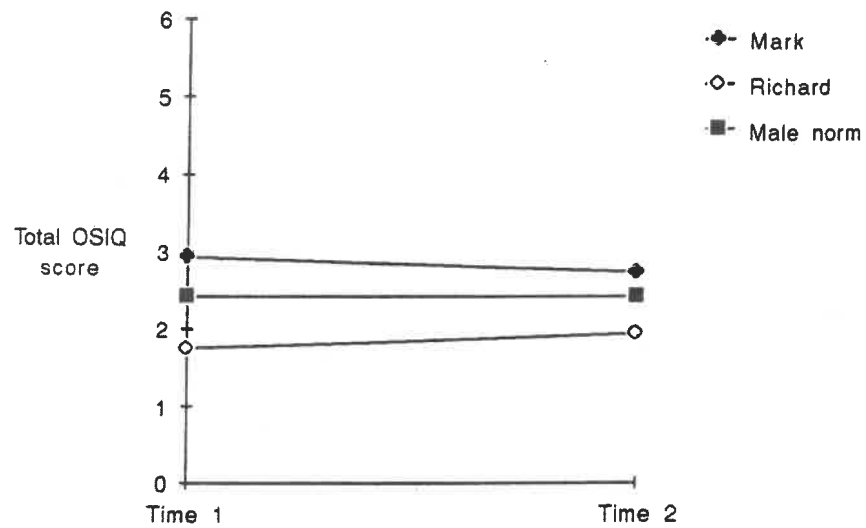
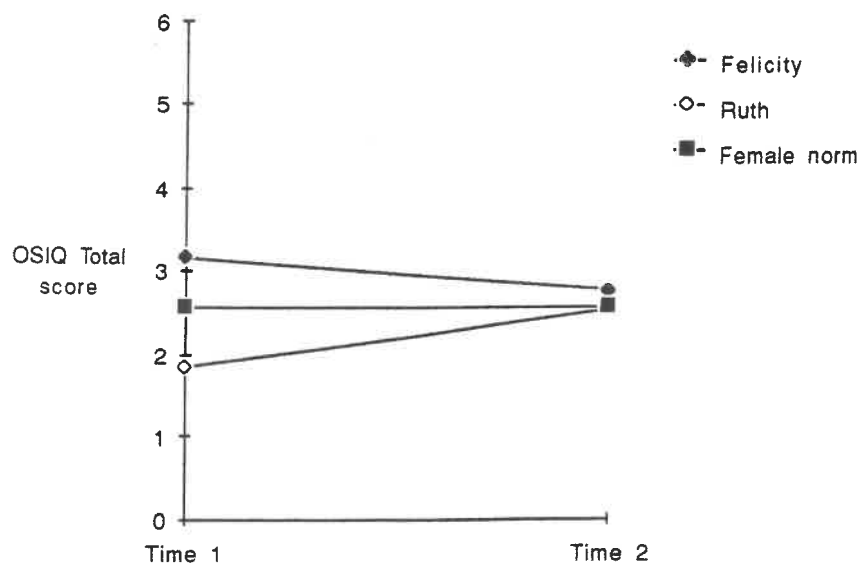
OSIQ total score, Time 1 and Time 2Richard and Mark

FIGURE 7.2

OSIQ total score, Time 1 and Time 2Felicity and Ruth

Parent Bonding Scores. Similarly, there have been some changes in parents' care and overprotection scores, but in only one family (Felicity's) have parents initially seen as optimal (high care and low overprotection) changed position. Those with good self-image scores at Time 1 (Richard and Ruth) have one parent in the optimal category at Time 1, and two in this category at Time 2. Mark has poor self-image scores at both times. His father remains in the rejection/neglect quadrant (low care and low overprotection), and his mother who was on the borderline at Time 1 now moves firmly into the affectionless control category (low care, high overprotection). The parent bonding scores of these individual cases do not remain static, but there is a reasonable degree of continuity. Bonding scores at Time 1 identify risk and predict adjustment in three out of four of these cases over time. In the fourth case (that of Felicity), the special circumstances of that separation must also be taken into account.

Family Conflict. A third factor shown to influence adolescent adjustment at both interviews (see Chapters 4 and 5) is the level of family conflict. The four case histories document the demoralising effects of conflict on adolescent school adjustment and general functioning. Conflict cross-cuts the two factors previously described. Thus although Felicity's parents are both seen as "optimal" at Time 1, the level of family conflict is so high that these relationships have not protected her from its effects, and her self-image scores are poor. Indeed her attempt to remain neutral towards two well-loved parents seems to have placed her in a particularly vulnerable situation. At the second interview the level of family conflict has dropped and her self-image has improved. Her mother is now just within the "reject/neglect" position and her father has moved to "affectionate constraint" (high care, high overprotection). As remarked above, this family still seems to be in process of re-stabilisation. In Mark's family, conflict involving his older brother is endemic and there is no other relationship to provide support. There seems to have been little change in this family over the three years of the study and Mark is caught in a highly aversive situation.

Conflict, therefore, can be seen as interacting with the other two predictive factors. In Felicity's case prolonged conflict between her parents seems to have contributed to the undermining of her longer term relationship with them both, and for Mark conflict has combined with poor parent-bonding, to create an exceptionally difficult environment. With



Richard resolution of conflict, combined with an optimal relationship with his mother, has allowed him to forge ahead, while Ruth also has experienced decreased tension following the divorce and a close relationship with her mother.

The finding that adolescent adjustment is related to the level of family conflict supports previous research (see Chapter 3), but closer examination suggests that more investigation of the inter-relationship between conflict, parent-child relationships and self-image is needed. High levels of conflict at each time interval are related to poor adjustment, so conflict can be seen as a risk factor; but there is variability in the degree to which conflict remains high. It may be that a good parent-child relationship constitutes a protection factor during a family crisis but is less effective when conflict is permanently entrenched. In predicting long-term outcome, therefore, conflict close to divorce may or may not be a useful guide, depending upon whether it is judged to be transitory or endemic.

### Divorce and Life Patterns

The emphasis in this thesis has been on the effects of divorce on psychological adjustment, but the case histories illustrate that decisions taken in adolescence may affect future prospects in practical ways. Mark and Ruth have left school before completing their final year, while Felicity and Richard are continuing their education. It would be rash to attribute these decisions to the divorce alone, but where divorce is associated with strong financial constraints, leaving school to get an unskilled job is an attractive option that may have limiting long-term consequences.

Sexual attitudes and behaviour may also influence outcomes in later life. An early sexual relationship (as in Ruth's case) could have had serious long-term consequences had she become pregnant.

### Specific Features

While factors identified through group analyses are clearly visible in the four case-histories, each family has unique features. Richard is a gifted student: high examination results have opened the door to a rewarding academic career and future profession. Mark's mother is a highly anxious and psychologically fragile woman and there is evidence of instability in other family members creating special difficulties for Mark. Felicity has had to

contend with a form of separation with high risks attached to it. Ruth has experienced a series of life events since the divorce which have created further crises to be surmounted. Individual factors will always interact with shared features, but the common threads running through each case can be seen to provide a valid basis for prediction.

### **Adolescent Development and Parent-Child Relationships**

A central finding of the statistical analysis, also emerging strongly from the case histories, is the importance to adolescents of their relationship with their parents. This has been represented by scores on the care and overprotection scales of the Parent Bonding Inventory. In the following section we seek to amplify understanding of how, at adolescence, these relationships contribute to coping with divorce. The discussion draws on interview material, using this to exemplify how aspects of adolescent development relate to modes of parenting and, when these fit well, help in adjustment to divorce. In particular we look at the capabilities that adolescents have, and how they respond when parents are sensitive to their needs and potential strengths.

Adolescence is a bridge between childhood and maturity - a time when the push for independence is strong, and yet family ties are very important. It is also a time of increased cognitive capacity. Parents are often slow to respond to changes in their children, anxious about how much freedom to give and uncomfortable about their developing sexuality. A shift has to be negotiated in parent-child relationships and this is not always easy to achieve. When divorce occurs at adolescence it brings a sobering realisation of adult problems, and it often necessitates a change towards more independence and responsibility. Parent-child relationships may change more readily under the pressure of this crisis.

Among the divorcing families seventy per cent of adolescents believed the separation had caused them to grow up more quickly. A girl of fifteen commented:

“Mentally I feel I’m more mature and more advanced than a lot of my friends because you have to understand life more. I now know that life and marriage isn’t ‘happy ever after’ - it may or may not work”.

A boy of the same age remarked:

"Before the separation I used to be stupid and muck around a lot at school. Now I'm more serious. I think it's good to have a joke - I'm not too serious - but I don't make a fool of myself no more. I always relied on Mum and Dad. It's made me grow up a bit - in understanding what problems are, what they were going through. I like it - being able to do things for myself."

Another boy's experience was very different. His mother, a highly anxious woman, believed her husband was far too lax in his handling of their sons. Her 14-year-old was torn between visits to his easy-going father, and a strictly enforced set of rules at home. He was rebellious and unhappy, commenting:

"[The divorce] has made me grow up slower. I feel I should be allowed out and I'm not. I have to take Jason [younger brother] with me - it's not fair. Seems like six months since I went out alone."

Divorce may hasten maturity by bringing out capacities that are part of this developmental stage. The increasing cognitive complexity of adolescents was discussed in Chapter 2. Interview responses show that this increase in understanding brings with it a pressing need to make sense of the divorce - to understand why it has happened and what it means in terms of the adolescent's own future.

An example of this is the struggle described by a fifteen-year old boy to come to terms with learning of the long-term infidelity of his Catholic father:

"[My parents] were always seen by people as a really happy couple and all the family thought that and it was a bit of a shock . . . I don't think Mum could fulfil what my Dad wanted sexually . . . now I understand that Dad has put up with an unhappy marriage for a long time, so that's good of him, and he's justified in his present actions now."

This boy and his brothers lived with their mother and his major sympathies were with her, but he had been able to come to an acceptance of the divorce through his effort to see things both from her view and from the perspective of his father.

The following advice, given by subjects to other adolescents facing their parents' divorce, also demonstrates the need to find meaning in the divorce:

"Tell them they'll have to work it out for themselves - reason it out and come to a balance within themselves because other people can't do that, even if you've got someone to talk to."

"Try and work things out and see what's happening, and try to let yourself know where you stand."

Parents who explained the divorce to their children were able to help them to accept it. But where no-one prepared them, adolescents were hurt and angry. A boy recollected his first knowledge of the separation:

"I didn't realise at all until the day. In the morning I woke up and my sister was there crying . . . Dad told me Mum was leaving and she left that morning with my brother and sister. Dad asked me what I wanted to do."

A girl commented: "I never really knew. Mum told me and I was really mad with her. I said, 'You could have told me something was going on.' "

The need for preparation is also expressed in the following advice to other parents contemplating divorce:

"Don't spring it on the children - slowly let them realise that everything isn't going to be fantastic."

"Don't hide anything. Explain everything - and I mean everything. Be totally honest."

Many adolescents showed the ability to understand the point of view of each parent and to separate these viewpoints from their own position, in line with the social perspective-taking skill of this cognitive stage (Selman et al, 1977). When parents communicated clearly with them, without attempting to enlist them against the other parent, they were able to mobilise this capacity, increasing their understanding and their ability to accept the divorce. A number of comments illustrate this :

"Sort of put yourself in your parents' position and see what they would think and do."

"Try and understand both sides. Try to find an understanding in it, because there's a reason why the whole thing happened. Try to think of them and their life and not just what you're missing out on."

"It would be wrong to try to get them to stay together. Everything is a lot happier if people are more content."

"Stick by them. If your mother was crying go in and comfort her and things like that. Love them both, not just one of them. Try to help them both."

The ability to find meaning in a major life event is recognised as an important step towards coping with it (Taylor, 1983). Where communication channels between parents and adolescents are open, the task of coming to terms with the divorce is easier than in those cases where parents are inaccessible or believe their adolescent children are not capable of this kind of understanding. However, adolescents are active makers of meaning - their capacity to take multiple perspectives means that they have the ability to spot a one-sided account of the marriage break-down or an attempt by one parent to disparage the other. The majority of those in the present study wished to stay out of their parents' conflict and were resentful of attempts to embroil them in it:

"I see parents as immature when they use kids to get back at each other. Whenever Mum and Dad have a backstab at each other I tell them what they're up to and how silly it is."

"Don't turn round and say 'Your father did this, your father did that, he's a bastard of a bloke.' I think that's wrong."

"Dad was always trying to denigrate Mum when I visited him. They each do it to each other, but Mum does it less."

Adolescents emerge from these interviews as perceptive and often compassionate onlookers. But they are also participants in the process of family change, and their relationships with their parents play an important part in this process. Sixty-three per cent see the divorce as having altered their relationship with one parent for the better, and twenty per cent believe relationships with both parents have improved:

"I feel closer to Mum. I'm treated like an adult here."

"Both Mum and Dad know what I'm doing. It's made them see me as an individual."

"It's made me see a lot of things differently and clearer. Like problems before at home. Mum wouldn't talk to me about it - now any problems we talk out together."

The shift towards a more adult-to-adult relationship with one (or each) parent following separation was commented on by many adolescents. Most saw this in terms of greater independence and responsibility and regarded it as a positive step in growing up. A few, however, were caught in situations where a parent leaned on them excessively.

Pam, aged 16 had left school and was "bringing home the bread" until her mother could find a job. Her mother had taken up with an alcoholic since the separation, and Pam described her as "going through the middle-age syndrome - total confusion." She commented:

"He was creepy. We had the same policeman each time he crashed through the door. We used to laugh with the policeman - but it wasn't funny really - I worried that I'd come home and find Mum stabbed and bloody in the flat. I sometimes feel responsible for her - but it's not really my business."

A fourteen-year old boy, living with a clinically depressed father, described coming home from school and having to cook and clean the house for a parent who was always finding fault. Material possessions were no compensation, as he commented three years later:

"A motor-bike's not good enough - happiness is missing."

These examples illustrate excessive dependence by poorly coping parents on their adolescent offspring. They counterpoint the cases where adults and adolescents have created a balance between security and independence, creating a mutually rewarding relationship with space for the adolescent to become his or her own person.

### **Family Relationships at Adolescence : Conclusion**

The interview material provides a window on the adolescents' relationships with their parents, amplifying the findings of the statistical analyses. A "good" parent-child relationship, typified in the earlier analyses by high care and low overprotection scores, translates into one where parents respect the adolescent and treat him or her as a responsible

person. The adolescent feels accepted and trusted, can communicate with parents and is given appropriate freedom, but is not overburdened with adult responsibilities. There will of course be bumpy stretches in the process of growing up, but the way is made smoother by the security of feeling loved and by freedom from overcontrolling surveillance. There is a good fit between this sort of relationship and the adolescent's developmental capacity, allowing it to be put to use in adapting to divorce.

In the following chapter the results reported in this thesis are integrated with past research and with theory, indicating how the present work adds to our knowledge of adolescents in divorce. In the final chapter we summarise how these findings may be put to practical use.

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## CHAPTER 8

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### IMPLICATIONS : RESEARCH AND THEORY

The time has come to draw together the results reported above, and to show their relevance to issues raised in previous studies and to theory.

This thesis has focused on a topic which has received sparse attention in previous research - the question of how young people respond when they are adolescent at the time of their parents' divorce. The main aim of the study has been to specify variables associated with adjustment close to divorce and three years later, and to identify factors at Time 1 predicting adjustment at Time 2.

It was emphasised in the Introduction that the focus of the research would be on the adolescents' experience of family separation and that it is their view that provides the main source of data though information independently derived from parents at Time 1 is also used. (Parent assessments of adolescent adjustment used in testing the first three hypotheses yielded results similar to those with adolescent-derived measures, supporting our confidence in the validity of the self-report measures.) A theoretical framework integrating developmental, symbolic interactionist and family systems theories was outlined.

Consistent with this approach a major goal has been to examine the association between adolescents' self-image and their perception of their interactions with each parent. The use of adolescent-derived measures for this purpose has shown that their account of these relationships is significantly related to their adjustment (as measured by self-image). It might be argued that the well-adjusted adolescent would be expected to view parents positively and that this is the direction of the causal relationship. But it has been shown that adolescents discriminate between parents along dimensions of care and overprotection, that adolescents with a high self-image do not necessarily view both parents in a favourable light, and that perception of current parent-child relationships affects self-image over and above baseline self-image scores. An interactive rather than linear interpretation has been advanced, which views self-image as both a product of and contributor to parent-child



interactions. Such a position takes account of his or her construal of the family and views the adolescent as an active participant in family processes.

The findings are now related to past research indicating their contribution to previous knowledge. Implications for theory are then discussed.

### **What Do The Present Findings Add To Previous Research?**

In integrating the present results with the literature, the methodological problems discussed in Chapter 2 are acknowledged. Differing samples and methods make direct comparisons difficult, and all subjects ultimately have the right to choose whether or not to participate. Biases may be present even in a sample from the most impeccable source, although steps can be taken to guard against this, as was reported in Chapter 3.

The following discussion refers selectively to the areas covered in the literature review in Chapter 2, concentrating on those to which the present results contribute most usefully.

#### **The Experience Of Divorce At Adolescence**

The results of this study have helped to fill a major gap in divorce research by examining adolescents at the time of their parents' divorce. It is the only known study sampling adolescents at divorce from a court-based population with a control group, using multiple measures and semi-structured interview techniques, and following subjects up over time. The results offer a perspective that differs markedly from that presented in the clinical studies reviewed in the first part of Chapter 2.

It is therefore argued that there has been too great a tendency to generalise observations based on the most vulnerable group of adolescents, and that this has obscured the distinction between the majority who cope well and the minority who need help. It should be noted, for example, that the well-known study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) plays an authoritative role in most reviews of the developmental impact of divorce on adolescents despite its small (eighteen at first interview and twelve at five years) and non-representative sample and its other major methodological problems. In the present study, by using a non-clinical sample controlled for time since separation and a control group of non-divorcing families, a clearer view of the effects of divorce at this developmental stage has been gained. Use of standard

measures has provided tools allowing quantitative analyses and comparison with norms, sidestepping problems associated with clinical evaluation.

This research has shown that adolescents can cope successfully with their parents' divorce and that a key factor is support from a high quality relationship with at least one parent. We have not found evidence to support the view taken by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) that divorce at adolescence interacts with age-specific turbulence in such a way as to magnify its impact and create major psychological disturbance. Instead by looking at adolescents as they go through this major life event we have seen a level of understanding and compassion that reveals a high capacity for maturity.

Age-specific strengths and needs at adolescence affecting their response to divorce are discussed in greater detail in the theoretical section below. In the following discussion comparisons are necessarily made between the present study of adolescents close to their parents' divorce and other adolescent studies where time since divorce is not controlled.

#### Adjustment and Parent-Child Relationships

As reported in previous chapters a strong finding to emerge from this research is the link shown between adolescents' adjustment and their experience of their interactions with their parents. It is the nature of these relationships, not divorced or intact family structure, that has been found to explain variance in self-image.

There is mounting evidence from studies using differing methods, samples and age-groups of the importance of parent-child relationships in mediating child adjustment in troubled families as was shown in Chapter 2. The present research confirms previous findings and adds to them. It demonstrates the effect of current parent-child relationships at divorce and after a three-year interval, and shows that knowledge of the adolescent's perception of these relationships in early adolescence can predict adjustment three years later. This finding has important theoretical and practical implications which are discussed below.

#### Undercontrol Versus Overcontrol

An issue which has attracted research interest has been that of deviance and undercontrol. Historically this has grown from concern that boys growing up in homes where only the mother is present will lack a father-figure with whom to identify (or a male

role model) and will not be properly disciplined by the mother. Psychoanalytic and also social learning theory converge on these issues.

The question of how parents handle independence issues at adolescence is an important one. Based on studies of younger children, Emery (1982) has argued that inconsistent discipline following divorce may account for conduct problems, and Dornbusch et al (1985) have suggested that permissive parenting in single-parent families is the cause of increased rates of deviant behaviour among adolescents. On the other hand, using a measure of self-esteem, Amato (1987) reports that parental control is positively correlated with high scores in young Australian children, but that these correlations are negative at adolescence.

The strong relationships found at each time interval in the present study between overprotection and poor self-concept indicate caution in over-emphasising parental discipline. The findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 strongly confirm the importance of independence at adolescence. Too much control is as much a predictor of poor self-image as is lack of parental love. This finding is true of girls and boys alike, and applies to young people from divorced and intact families at both interview phases. These findings suggest that overcontrol undermines self-confidence and that successful parenting at adolescence involves the transformation of dependence into autonomy.

Emphasis in past studies on anti-social behaviour as an outcome measure has directed attention away from the negative effects that over-control may have on other aspects of psychological functioning. The present results correct this balance and suggest that future research might examine possible inter-relationships between parenting styles differing along several dimensions with measures of both internal and external psychological functioning.

These issues are not simply academic. Dissemination of the view that family disruption leads to antisocial behaviour may feed back into social policy, influencing custody and access decisions and channelling parenting strategies in the direction of a more authoritarian stance in child management. It is important that the negative effects of overcontrol at adolescence should also be understood.

### Family Conflict

At each time interval adolescent adjustment was found to be linked to the level of family conflict experienced. This finding is in agreement with the large body of research reviewed in Chapter 2 indicating that high levels of conflict are bad for children, both in intact families and following divorce. A number of studies have shown, as we have done, that it is exposure to conflict rather than family structure per se that is implicated in poor adolescent adjustment (Kurdek and Sinclair, 1987; Ochiltree and Amato, 1984; Slater and Haber, 1984). The present results reinforce the need to focus on the quality of family relationships rather than assuming, as is often done, that divorced families are inherently more conflict-ridden than those where both parents live together, or that having lived in a highly conflictual family casts an inevitable shadow over future adjustment.

The question of the reversibility of the effects of conflict is important. Our findings agree with those of Rutter (1971) who found that children respond with better adjustment scores when conflict diminishes. However Block et al (1986) and Chess et al (1983) report long-term consequences for children exposed to conflict in early childhood, although the latter authors stress that it is conflict in the intact family (whether prior to divorce or not) rather than divorce itself that predicts later problems. The present results cannot throw light on the long-term effects of conflict in infancy, but show that adolescent self-image is related at each time interval to the perceived level of current family climate, and that those reporting decreased conflict have good adjustment scores.

In the predictive analyses reported in Chapter 6, conflict at Time 1 is correlated with adjustment at Time 2, but drops out of the equation when parent-child relationships are included. Thus it appears that these domains overlap, but that the nature of the adolescent's relationship with each parent exerts a more powerful influence on self-image. This result opens the way for further research exploring the association between these key family processes.

### Custody Issues

We found no evidence in this adolescent sample to support the findings of studies with younger children by Santrock and Warshak (1979) and Warshak and Santrock (1983) that

children fare better with a custodial parent of the same sex. At the first interview the nature of the relationship with the parent was the significant factor, rather than the sex of the child or the parent. Three years later custody played no significant part in accounting for variance in adjustment scores. Those over eighteen were no longer subject to court orders concerning custody, and presumably sixteen to seventeen-year-olds find it easier to vote with their feet than younger children if they are unhappy with their living arrangements.

The strong relationship found between self-image and parent-child relationships in this study has important implications for custody decision-making, and this issue is discussed in the final chapter.

### Parental Coping And Child Adjustment

As reported in Chapter 4, some relationships were found between measures of parent and adolescent adjustment, but consistent results were not found in all the measures examined. This result only partially supports the link between parent coping and child adjusted found in the studies reviewed in Chapter 2. Perhaps this result is due to the wider social world of adolescents than younger children, affording them greater avenues of escape from parental pathology.

### Continuing Relationships With Fathers

Our results have repeatedly shown that both parents are important to adolescents, and that when there is an "optimal" relationship (high care, low overprotection) with either mother or father, self-image scores are good. However, there does seem to be more variability in adolescents' relationships with fathers than with mothers. This was especially noticeable among the divorced group, as was noted in Chapters 4 and 5, where emotional response to the divorce was found to be correlated with a series of items concerning the father, with regret among those who were close to their fathers and acceptance and relief among those who viewed him negatively. Most research in this area has drawn attention to the benefits to children of a good relationship with the non-custodial parent (Hess and Camara, 1979; Kurdek, 1987; Warshak and Santrock, 1983), but the present results show that this relationship can be a difficult one and an adolescent may need help in working through angry and ambivalent feelings, or in expressing grief.

### Relationships With Step-Parents

Questions were asked in the interviews about relationships with step-parents and step-siblings but no significant associations were found between these items and adjustment scores. The over-arching importance of the adolescent's relationship with his or her own parents emerges as the main factor.

### Socio-Economic Issues

Relationships between economic disadvantage in single parent homes and child outcomes were reviewed in Chapter 2. It was pointed out there that these effects are difficult to disentwine because of the great heterogeneity among those from disrupted homes. There is ample research evidence of financial decline following separation and divorce, but distinctions should be drawn between those already disadvantaged by low income and poor education, forced into poverty by abandonment, and others for whom divorce has less devastating financial consequences.

The present study represents those seeking legal divorce after an average of 17 years of marriage. As reported in Chapter 3, the sample includes a slightly higher proportion of fathers with blue than white-collar jobs, but under-represents the poorest divorcing group, and cannot speak for single-parents outside the divorcing population. Significant differences were found between incomes in divorced and intact families, and financial stringency was commented on by many subjects but, as noted in Chapters 3 and 6, adolescent adjustment was not significantly related to socio-economic factors in this sample.

The possibility exists that longer term economic consequences may flow on for those dropping out of the educational system early. There are indications that some adolescents were influenced in their decision to leave school by their family situation, and rather more of the divorced group had left by the second interview although there was no significant group difference.

### Heterosexual Relationships And Attitudes To Marriage

Much has been written about the negative effects of divorce on adolescent attitudes to their own future relationships (Kelly, 1981; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980)b. As reported in

Chapter 5, we found no group differences in expectations about marriage, nor on a readiness for intimacy scale. There was concern among some of the divorced group that their own marriage might fail, but the extremes reported by Kelly (1981) were absent. The present results were closer to those of Ganong et al. (1981), Robson (1983) and Stevenson (1987). There was a trend for greater sexual experience among those from divorced homes, but not as marked as that found by Booth et al (1984) in their large Nebraska college sample. As suggested in Chapter 5, the lack of a contemporary control group in the Californian study may account for the discrepancy between our results and those of Kelly. In the present study there was a high expectancy of marriage, but subjects from both family groups were aware of the high divorce rate and viewed legal marriage as a commitment to be made with considerable care, about half supporting the practice of living together first to test the relationship. The need to situate research of this nature within a contemporary social context emerges clearly from these results.

### Sex Differences

Among younger children there is evidence that boys are more adversely affected by divorce and take longer to recover from the experience than girls, but studies of adolescents from divorced families find few sex differences (see Chapter 2). The present research provides new information on this issue from its examination of adolescents close to the time of divorce and three years later. No significant differences were found in self-image at either time. Although their scores were within normal limits, there was some evidence that the divorced group boys had higher depression scores than the girls at Time 1, and their anxiety levels were somewhat high. These effects had disappeared by Time 2, when average depression scores were low for all the adolescents, but girls were more anxious than boys in each family group.

It appears from the present results that divorce at adolescence does not have the strong differential effect observed for younger boys and girls. A weaker echo of this sex difference may be seen in the depression and anxiety results at Time 1, but it is important to note that better-than-average depression scores for the divorced group girls partly account for differences on this scale.

### Age Differences

Time since separation was controlled in the present study, with a mean time of eighteen months, and all adolescents were interviewed close to the divorce. Age was included as a covariate in the analyses performed, and no age-related adjustment differences were found at the first interview. At the second interview a significant difference emerged, with those who were younger having poorer adjustment scores than the older adolescents. This effect appeared to be stronger for the divorced than the intact family group, although the result has to be seen only as a trend. Previous studies using children of mixed age-groups (Kurdek et al, 1981; Kurdek, 1987; Stolberg and Anker, 1983) have shown that older subjects fare better when their parents part, but little is known about differences within the adolescent age-range.

The present finding indicates the possibility of a differential effect on the rate of development of adolescents according to their age at divorce. Further investigation of this question would be of interest.

### Longitudinal Results

As has been described in Chapter 6, the present research has attempted to go beyond those previous studies which used self-image simply as an outcome measure. An explanatory model was proposed to account for the strong relationships found between self-image and perceived relationships with parents at each time interval. The results reported in that chapter show continuity in family subsystems continuing into the post-divorce family. The association between the nature of parent-child interactions and adolescent self-concept was viewed as bi-directional.

Prediction was shown to be possible, based on knowledge of adolescent self-image and/or perception of parent-child relationships close to divorce. The longitudinal nature of this research has provided a framework allowing examination of both continuity and disruption, and has made it possible to indicate risk and protection factors for adolescents. These predictive results make a major contribution to knowledge about adolescent response to divorce and are discussed more fully in the theoretical section below.



### Summary

Divorce at adolescence has been found to be a painful event but one which adolescents can surmount with the support of a warm and non-overprotective relationship with at least one parent.

We have taken previous findings further by showing that the degree of current family conflict experienced and the nature of adolescents' interactions with their parents are related to their adjustment at divorce and are also salient three years later. It has also been shown that knowledge of the adolescent's perception of parent-child relationships at divorce can be used to predict self-concept three years later. Similarly self-image has been shown to be a relatively robust characteristic, so that poor self-image at the time of divorce is a risk factor for future adjustment.

This research has indicated a way of identifying those adolescents who are most at risk and points towards alternative modes of intervention. Individual therapy enhancing self-esteem or family therapy aimed at improving parent-child interactions are possible routes towards helping the vulnerable adolescent.

We now turn to the theoretical implications of these results, both using theory as an interpretive framework and examining how the present results can feed back to the theoretical positions discussed.

### **Theoretical Implications**

In Chapter 1 it was pointed out that much past research has been a "snap-shot" where divorce is seen as a categorical variable impacting on a passive child. It was argued that insights from developmental, symbolic interactionist and family systems perspectives draw attention to multiple, time-related processes, where the child is viewed as an actor rather than a mere respondent. In Chapter 3 a model was proposed illustrating how family processes can be viewed from the perspective of these three levels of interpretation. Turning back to these theories now we find that developmental theory raises questions and suggests some explanations for the present results; symbolic interactionism provides a possible mechanism accounting for the observed link between family processes and self-image; and family

systems theory locates the adolescent in a context, inviting questions about the interaction of intra- and extra-personal processes.

### Developmental Theory

In Chapter 1 three developmental perspectives on adolescence were outlined. Psychoanalytic theory is well represented by the influential study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b). These writers base their interpretations on psychoanalytic conceptions of the nature of adolescence itself, the nature of parent/child relations at adolescence and the relationship between adjustment and emotion. We first consider whether the present results lend support to the psychoanalytic assumption that adolescence is a period of major personality restructuring involving normative instability and crisis, or whether it is more appropriately conceptualised by a second and more recent theory of adolescence, that of multidimensional change.

### Psychoanalytic versus Multidimensional Change Perspectives.

The Nature of Adolescence. As was outlined in Chapter 1, the psychoanalytic view is that adolescence is an intrinsically unstable period because of the strengthening of sexual and aggressive drives at puberty, and the consequent re-emergence of unresolved Oedipal conflicts, coupled with the developmental task of separation from parents. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b, page 85) argue that divorce at this stage carries special risks since it interacts with "issues which cause adolescents intense concern in the normal course of events", thus "magnifying the impact of the divorce many times". They speak of the "overwhelming" experience of their adolescent subjects, and comment that the revelation of parents as sexual beings was especially disturbing at this developmental stage, causing the adolescents "sexual excitement, acute anxiety, anger, outrage, embarrassment, dismay and envy"

Theoretical assumptions influence expectations and affect criteria by which adjustment is judged. Wallerstein and Kelly use clinical evaluations which incorporate emotional, behavioural and parent-child elements. Deviation from normality is based on clinical judgement, as viewed from this theoretical stance. As pointed out earlier, these writers use

no comparison group of non-divorcing adolescents to check these assumptions, and to guard against wrongfully attributing observed deviance to divorce alone.

To what extent is the psychoanalytic position supported when a comparison group is used and adjustment is measured by standard measures that have been shown to be valid instruments for measuring self-image, anxiety and depression and for discriminating healthy from disturbed subjects? (See Chapter 3.)

If adolescence were a normally unstable stage, one would indeed expect, as do Wallerstein and Kelly, to find poorer adjustment in those experiencing the added stressor of divorce than among those from intact families. We have, however, found no group differences in adjustment across a range of analyses both at the time of divorce and three years later. A similar range of adjustment scores exists in both groups, and average scores for each group do not deviate from published norms. These results throw doubt on the psychoanalytic account of adolescence, and raise the question of whether any factors associated with this stage of development have in fact aided successful adjustment.

Some of Wallerstein and Kelly's observations have their counterpart in the present research, but we have not found the same intensity of distress nor degree of psychological disturbance that they describe. Sometimes our interpretations differ. For example, in Chapter 7 Ruth's basic psychological adjustment is judged as robust on the basis of sound self-image scores, although clearly she has engaged in some risky behaviours. Her close relationship with her mother is seen as a protection factor, whereas Wallerstein and Kelly would judge it as breaching generational boundaries and therefore as maladaptive (see below). Note is taken of her raised anxiety score at Time 2, but this is judged in the context of recent life events and a self-image score which is still favourable.

In respect of the nature of adolescence, then, a multi-dimensional change perspective which sees it as a period of multiple adjustments but not as one of inevitable crisis seems to provide a more open-minded approach than one incorporating psychoanalytic assumptions. It allows for a wider range of individual differences, and situational factors interpreted in context rather than according to theoretical precept. However, both these approaches need to be augmented by greater emphasis on cognitive development, as will be discussed below.

Relationships Between Parents and Children: Theoretical Issues. A central finding of the present research is that healthy self-image is associated with high quality parent-child relations as perceived by the adolescent in both intact and separated families. Wallerstein and Kelly also draw attention to the importance of parent-child relationships, indeed they repeatedly see these as the key to post-divorce child adjustment. However what is regarded as "good" parenting is also influenced by theoretical assumptions. Because of concern over re-emergence of Oedipal conflicts, much emphasis is placed on the need to ensure that boundaries between generations are maintained. Wallerstein and Kelly are keenly aware of the need for adolescents to differentiate from the family of origin, and according to psychodynamic precept this is normally achieved by means of a struggle to break free from emotional bonds with primary love objects. Adolescence is seen as a period of decathecting of parents so that libido is freed for re-investment in heterosexual relationships in adulthood. Good parenting is perceived as authoritative and competent, with distance between adults and adolescents ensuring that neither parents nor children depend unduly on each other for emotional support.

These writers therefore see dangers in parental behaviour which blurs the distinction between the generations. They write disparagingly, for example, of a 33-year-old divorcee who, in 1971, "wore her skirts very short, her clothing very tight, and her hair loose in the style of a teenager" (1980, page 84), though such attire would hardly have been unusual for a young woman at that time. They go on to discuss the unhappy relationship between this woman and her daughter in terms of sexual rivalry. They also comment on the danger of a reversal of the parent-child role in cases where an adolescent is called upon to provide strength for a devastated parent, noting that such over-dependence may endanger the process of separation. While these comments may be valid for particular cases, it is argued that over-emphasis on the maintenance of generational boundaries may in fact diminish a valuable source of coping for adolescents. Weiss (1979b) comments on the adaptive nature of a less hierarchical family structure following divorce, where adolescents share responsibilities and participate in decision-making.

The present results indicate that differentiation from parents at adolescence need not involve the breaking of affective bonds, but is better seen as a process of transformation,

bridging dependency and adult equality. The process may not always be easy, but it appears likely that it is only when it is blocked that the fierce struggle described as normative in psychoanalytic theory emerges.

It may be that psychoanalytic theoretical assumptions about the nature of adolescence have resulted in the confounding of two dimensions of parenting which are in fact separable. Parker (1983) has provided an effective measure for distinguishing between an overprotective, infantilising and intrusive dimension on the one hand, and one of warmth and care on the other. By regarding these aspects as orthogonal he has shown that parenting styles can vary along both axes. Thus while some parents fit the "smother-love" image of closeness and overprotection, others bind their children to them by methods of psychological control without warmth. The rejecting parent is cold and his or her lack of control amounts to neglect, while optimal parenting involves retention of close, warm and affectionate relations while relinquishing developmentally inappropriate control. Such a position suggests that "good" parenting at adolescence need not be distant and will be sensitive to privacy and independence. Our results agree with those reported by Parker (1983) which show that a high level of warmth together with low overprotection provide a relationship in which adolescent development can thrive.

As discussed in Chapter 7, adolescents in both family groups are in process of negotiating this transformation. Many adolescents believe divorce has hastened their independence and has also allowed a more mature relationship to develop with one (or each) parent. In the case histories reported in that chapter all except Mark spontaneously remark on the shift towards friendship in their relationship with parents.

The relationships that emerge from the interviews are ones where generational boundaries are de-emphasised: they reflect warmth, trust and mutual respect rather than distance. Contrary to the psychoanalytic model, this egalitarianism is usually matched by mature and responsible adolescent behaviour. This evidence suggests that viewing these two dimensions as orthogonal is helpful in proposing an alternative view of the process of differentiation. Closeness with independence need not be binding, but overprotection appears to undermine self-esteem. Differentiation from parents is a key task of adolescence, but the present data suggest that this process need not involve emotional upheaval. It may be

facilitated when parents, facing their own marital crisis, recognise the strength and maturity of adolescent children. When childhood dependency is transformed into this kind of relationship through divorce it may be seen as a beneficial side-effect of a painful life event.

If Wallerstein and Kelly's theoretical stance led them to counsel distance in parent-child relations, they may have unwittingly undermined a source of support by confounding emotional closeness with overprotection.

Adjustment and Emotions. Psychodynamic practice encourages abreaction of emotion. Wallerstein and Kelly probe their adolescents' emotional responses over a six-week initial counselling period, and find a very high degree of distress and anger. We did not find such intense levels of emotional upset at the first interview, although there is evidence that some children had been through a difficult time.

Wallerstein and Kelly do not indicate whether they controlled for the time since final separation in their sampling process. All their couples had separated when interviewed and, as in the present study, had filed for divorce. It may be, however, that some of the Californian families were interviewed at a point closer to the initial crisis of separation than those in the present sample, since under the Australian Act application cannot be made until a year's separation has taken place. This might, in part, explain the higher degree of emotional distress reported by these authors. Alternatively, as noted above, consonant with their psychodynamic position, their counselling method may have elicited these strong emotional responses.

Our contact was by no means as concentrated as that of Wallerstein and Kelly, but good rapport was built up by trained interviewers in home interviews lasting an average of one and a half hours at the first research phase. As reported in Chapter 4, the results show that many subjects had had mixed feelings when their parents parted. Ninety per cent reported feeling sad, over a half were shocked and found it hard to believe. A similar proportion felt angry with one parent, and a third expressed a degree of anger with both. Nearly a third wondered if they had been to blame, and about a quarter reported feeling rejected by the parent who had left. At the same time many expressed relief at the lessening of family tension. Forty per cent were at least a little glad that the separation had taken place.

It was clear that many adolescents had been through a period of confusion, anger and distress when the family crisis was at its height, but when interviewed by us at the time of the actual divorce family restructuring was already occurring.

In Chapters 4 and 5 it has been shown that measures of psychological adjustment are not closely related to emotional response to the divorce. It was argued that two factors explain these results. Firstly, individual adolescents respond very differently according to their appraisal of specific family factors - some are deeply sad, others are delighted that a bad situation has come to an end, and many are both sad and relieved. These responses may be appropriate to a particular context and cannot be seen as indicating "good" or "poor" adjustment per se. Secondly, though prolonged depression is clearly maladaptive, strong expressions of emotions such as anger and sadness close to the crisis point may be part of a necessary process of mourning.

As psychodynamic therapists, Wallerstein and Kelly would agree that expression rather than suppression of feelings is healing, and yet their clinical assessments lean heavily on expressed emotion as a sign of poor adjustment. The distress experienced by many youngsters when their parents part should not be underemphasised, but it is misleading to equate emotional response close to a major life crisis with psychological maladjustment.

### Cognitive Developmental Theory

A cognitive developmental perspective (Longfellow, 1979) places emphasis on increased cognitive complexity at adolescence including abstract thinking and advanced social perspective taking and interpersonal reasoning. In coping with a major family crisis the adolescent can draw upon the capacity to view events from several perspectives simultaneously. As discussed in Chapter 7, the interview responses demonstrate the capacity to understand the view-point of parents, separating personal needs from those of each parent. The case-histories also demonstrate this response and show a strong need to understand the reasons for the divorce in order to cope with it.

Adolescent cognitive complexity creates a need to make meaning out of family events and also provides a source of coping strength. The capacity to stand back and view events from outside allows the adolescent to distance him or herself from parents' conflict, and also

provides a basis for a better understanding of the divorce than is possible for younger children. The compassion of many fifteen-year-olds was very striking. Their ability to adopt multiple views seems also to involve the capacity to empathise, thus helping the adolescent to understand and accept the divorce.

Recognition of the cognitive capacity of adolescents helps to explain both their ability to derive support from a mature relationship with adults, and also highlights their very great need for explanation and preparation. This is, of course, important at every age but the degree to which parents failed to warn their adolescent children or supply reasons for the break-up was surprising. Adolescents were warmly appreciative of parents who respected their right to know what was happening and who talked the matter out with them at an appropriate level.

Kohlberg and Gilligan (1971) draw attention to developmental progress in moral development during adolescence from conventional morality to postconventional moral reasoning among some but not all young people. Moral issues are important at adolescence and divorce may cause some adolescents to go through a disturbing period of doubt and reassessment of their own value-system. Those with families with a strong religious background may react particularly strongly to the discovery that a parent does not live up to the standards that they have themselves been taught, as can be seen from the case-histories of Richard and Mark in Chapter 7. Both these boys judged their fathers initially according to conventional rules, but each was able to move to more sophisticated levels of understanding, though Mark's judgements retain a rigidity that Richard has transcended.

Their advanced level of cognitive capacity appears to provide adolescents with a means of understanding and coping with divorce. It also seems that this experience may accelerate progress to new levels of thinking for some. Further research designed specifically to test these theoretical issues could be of value to those designing intervention programmes for children of divorce, and also for other children experiencing major upheavals in their lives.

Summary. The present results do not support the "turmoil" theory of adolescence proposed by psychoanalysis. They are congruent with a cognitive-developmental position, and one which sees development in terms of multidimensional changes, including



transformation of relationships between parents and adolescents in response to maturity and independence needs.

From this perspective, it is argued that adolescents have developmental strengths which they can draw on in times of family crisis. These include the capacity to develop mature and mutually supportive relationships with parents who understand their need for love and autonomy; and the capacity to use cognitive gains to understand and cope with family change.

### The Self - a Symbolic Interactionist view

In Chapter 1 Mead's symbolic interactionist theory (1934) was proposed as a means of explaining the co-occurrence of continuity and change in self-image. A theoretical explanation for the link found in this study between self-image and perceived parent-child relationships can be found in this approach. Mead's theory directs attention to the role played by the individual's perception of the self as perceived by significant others. In childhood parents play a crucial part in reflecting back to the child an image of himself - or herself - through which the child learns self-evaluation. The child is viewed as an active participant in this process. Self-image may be seen as emerging initially from the interaction of child characteristics and behaviours and parent's attitudes and behaviours, later modified by experiences with others beyond the family.

The model presented in Chapter 3 can be used to illustrate symbolic interactionist processes. It postulates a bi-directional causal relationship between adolescent self-image and parent-child relationships, representing these as continuing over time. Evidence for the validity of this model has emerged from the cross-sectional and predictive results at Time 2. In Chapter 6 continuity in adjustment and in family processes was shown, and it was argued that the redundancy of Time 1 parent-child scores when Time 1 self-image is included in the analysis, demonstrates the close relationship between these Time 1 variables. The adolescent's perception of these earlier parent-child relationships have, in Mead's terms, become incorporated into the self-image. The final reduced equation at Time 2 shows that 40 per cent of the variance in self-image scores at that time can be explained by adolescent adjustment three years previously, with the addition of one current parenting variable. Self-

image emerges as closely associated with the adolescent's view of the parent's attitude and behaviour towards him or herself; it is also shown to be quite stable over time.

Several writers have commented on the fact that some children - even those from the same family - seem to have greater intrinsic coping ability than others. Anthony (1974 a,b) writes of the vulnerable and the invulnerable child. Kurdek (1987) comments on intrinsic factors affecting divorce adjustment, and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) refer to the child's past history within the family and his or her ability to use personal resources. These comments refer to a well-entrenched aspect of the personality, a predisposition that is seen as stable over time.

The symbolic interactionist perspective, as proposed above, provides a mechanism to explain individual differences in vulnerability and resilience. The intimate relationship proposed between a child's development of a sense of self and his or her perceptions of interactions with significant others provides for the incorporation of self-perceptions and expectations of self-other interactions into the personality. These then become a relatively stable substrate on which future experiences are built. Where these interactions and self-appraisals have created a concept of the self as loved, trusted and competent, there is a basis for resilience. However, where the sense of self includes perceptions of rejection, failure, and lack of love from significant others the child is likely to interpret events from the perspective of a self-evaluation that is insecure and vulnerable.

At adolescence young people have had many years of interaction with their parents and the self-image brought to the divorce will have been influenced by these long-term relationships for better or for worse. Given that these interactions are so important it is not surprising that the perceived nature of parent-child relationships plays a mediating role in divorce adjustment, and that a "good" relationship with at least one parent can be a protective factor when parents part.

Symbolic interactionism, then, provides an account of continuity, but it also allows for change. The nature of interactions with significant others can change over time, and the person is not irrevocably tied to interpretations of the self learned in the past. This approach can be fruitfully integrated with family systems theory and the therapies that flow from it.

Symbolic interactionism draws attention to the person as an experiencing subject. The links found between adolescent adjustment and perception of the quality of post-divorce family life indicate the importance of taking into account the ways in which the adolescent experiences and perceives separation. By attempting to see the family through the eyes of the adolescent, individual responses can be better understood, and gaps in understanding filled.

### Family Systems Approach

The term "family break-up" has been avoided in this thesis because it has connotations of the abrupt ending of a family when parents part. We have preferred to adopt a family systems approach which allows us to see how family structures can be transformed, maintaining key parent-child relationships although marital ties are broken. The significant correlations found between parent bonding measures over three years attests to the continuity of these relationships.

Beal (1979) describes the ideal situation as one where parents are able to separate their spousal from their parenting roles, so that each may continue to be parents although the marital relationship has ended. The desire for this situation was eloquently expressed by our subjects as shown in Chapter 7.

A family systems approach allows us to see adaptation to change as a normal process that must take place as the family life cycle progresses. Developmental change in children requires adaptation of the family system, especially at adolescence, where the need for gradual disengagement from the family emerges. Rigidly enmeshed families have difficulty permitting separation, but a family system may also be overly diffuse, lacking sufficient structure to provide support for its members.

Divorce at adolescence creates a major disruption of the system, but the present results suggest that sub-systems within the family can still provide a structure for family members. Thus our finding of the benefit of caring but non-overprotective parent-child relationships is congruent with a systems approach, drawing attention to the danger of enmeshment when ties are over-binding and to the continuity of developmental needs despite family upheaval.

A systems approach combines well with cognitive developmental theory, as noted above. Cognitive gains at adolescence help a youngster to see the transformed family as continuing to function even though parents are no longer together. A fifteen-year-old boy illustrates this point:

"As far as I'm concerned this is my family arrangement. Just as other kids have got their family in one place, mine is in two different places, and that's just how it is."

Leaving home in late adolescence/early adulthood is normal but the young person still remains part of the family. The same ability to preserve the psychological continuity of family relationships despite geographical distance is evident among adolescents following divorce, provided they are not enmeshed in continuing hostility.

A family systems approach draws attention to continuity via transformation. This continuity is demonstrated in the present study by the continued salience of parent-child relationships at both time intervals. When viewed in conjunction with symbolic interactionist mechanisms discussed above, the protective nature of good parent-child relationships can be seen to transcend parental separation. Vulnerability can also be understood where relationships are impoverished, and the child whose self-concept is already low is provided with little or no continuing support.

The present results raise questions about the interface between individual characteristics and the family as a system. The wider view presented by a systemic approach is useful in focusing on interactive processes in the family as a whole, but symbolic interactionism highlights the consequences of these interactions for individual participants. Integration of these two theoretical positions with a developmental perspective provides a holistic framework for understanding families and their members in transition.

Theory, then has provided a useful interpretive frame-work. In turn, the present findings can make some contributions to theory.

### **What Do The Present Findings Add To Theory?**

Viewing adolescents from the perspective of a critical life event has shown that they have capacities for maturity and compassion, and draws attention to the potential strengths of

this period of development. These results throw doubt on the psychoanalytic view of adolescence as an intrinsically unstable phase of personality development. Our findings support a theory of adolescence as a period of multiple change and cognitive growth, and draw attention to potentialities not normally tapped in Western societies where adolescence is commonly viewed as an extension of childhood. These results flow on to implications about the nature of interactions between parents and adolescent children that differ from those proposed by psychoanalytic writers. A relatively smooth transition to a more egalitarian relationship is seen as a logical consequence of recognition of the adolescent need for independence and capacity for maturity.

The present results provide support for symbolic interactionism, demonstrating the closeness of fit between self-image and perceived parent-child interactions at two time intervals and over time. Integration of developmental theory with this position has shown that interactions between significant others should take account of changing needs and capabilities, suggesting a fruitful source of further investigation within these frameworks.

The findings also feed back to family systems theory. They support a view of the family as a system undergoing transition, demonstrating the continuity of subsystems and pointing to family therapy as a means of enhancing parent-child interactions and facilitating family transformation. The link found between overprotection and poor adjustment supports systemic emphasis on problems posed by enmeshment in a family system. The main findings confirm the need to focus on family processes as a key issue in adolescent adjustment whether both parents are together or not.

Integration of all three approaches provides a three-level theoretical framework which could be useful in future research. All provide for continuity and change over time, but each contributes its own perspective. Developmental theory contributes understanding of changes generated by life-span development in family members and in alterations occasioned by this to the interface between family members and society. Symbolic interactionism fits well in a systemic framework and contributes to analysis at the level of the experiencing individual. Family systems theory provides an overarching framework, focusing on the functioning of the family as a whole and its inter-relatedness with the wider social world. Both these positions draw attention to interactive rather than monodirectional processes, correcting a

tendency in some areas of developmental theory to emphasise parent-to-child at the expense of child-to-parent effects. Systems theory, however, can run the risk of over-emphasis on the functioning of the system. The two previous positions draw attention back to the people who make up the family - their developmental differences and the phenomenology of their interactions with each other.

The findings of this research have supported the thesis that adolescent adjustment is related to family processes rather than to intact or divorced family structure. The relationship demonstrated between family processes and adolescent self-image at each time interval, and the discovery of strong continuity over time supports the contention that prediction of longer term outcome can be based on understanding of these processes.

In the following chapter implications for social policy are briefly discussed and a concluding summary is presented.

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## CHAPTER 9

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### APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

#### Practical Application

A major implication of the present study is that adolescents who experience their parents' divorce should not be stigmatised as deviant. There is strong evidence of maturity and psychological health among the majority of the divorcing sample. The results also indicate risk factors which may help to identify those who are most vulnerable, and suggest strategies for easing the transition from one family form to another.

#### Identifying The Vulnerable Adolescent

The strong relationship found in this study between adolescent self-image at each time interval indicates a probability that the child whose psychological adjustment is poor at the time of the divorce will remain poorly adjusted three years later. Statistical analyses tell us about group effects rather than individual cases, and there is evidence that improvement in the family situation following divorce facilitates adjustment, however this main result suggests that poor self-image at divorce is a risk factor.

The analysis close to the time of divorce indicates that the poorly adjusted adolescent is experiencing high levels of family conflict, does not believe the family situation has improved and has parents seen as overprotective and uncaring. Those whose custodial parent is seen in this way have poor adjustment scores, while those who have at least one "optimal" parent are faring well. These results suggest a means of identifying those with a higher than average probability of longer term disturbance. Implications for counselling parents and adolescents, for court procedures and for custody follow.

#### Counselling

The results demonstrate the negative effects of continued conflict, and interview comments support the desire of adolescents to distance themselves from warring parents. Strong feelings of distress were expressed about situations where they were caught in the cross-fire, or were asked to side with one parent against the other. Getting this message

across to parents and others involved in divorce procedures is highly desirable. Parental insight into the damage done by involving children in conflict may be difficult to achieve during the heat of divorce, but self-interest may prevail if it is pointed out that implying that only one parent may be loved is a two-edged sword. At the second round of interviews it was found that several adolescents had switched allegiance where neutrality had been made impossible. For example a boy whose parents were locked in bitter conflict, involving acrimonious court cases over the custody of a younger brother, totally supported his mother at the first interview. Three years later he had severed all links with her and was living with his father. A neutral position was out of the question in this family.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) note that among the best adjusted adolescents at their first follow-up were those who had distanced themselves from their parents' conflicts, appearing to these writers to be abnormally detached at first interview. In retrospect they realised that the strategy of "strategic withdrawal" had protected these adolescents from emotional stress. Where this strategy is employed by children, attempts by counsellors to elicit emotional responses or draw adolescents into discussion of painful family matters may be counter-productive, undermining a useful temporary means of defence. Parents, also, should be encouraged to see it as a valuable protective device for their children.

On the other hand, an assumption that "good" divorce adjustment demands equal acceptance of each parent fails to allow sufficiently for particular circumstances. In some cases, especially where violence, sexual abuse, or rejection by one parent had occurred, an alliance with the remaining parent provided security and support. A standard measure of divorce response such as that of Kurdek and Berg (1987) may be a useful tool for identifying children whose attitudes to the divorce are problematic, but clearly evaluation of their beliefs must be interpreted in the light of specific family experience.

Ambivalent feelings were common, and helping a child to come to terms with strong and mixed feelings, when these are evident, is essential. For example, one boy had been through a bad time living with a demanding and clinically depressed father after the separation. Now living with his mother, he felt very angry with his father but was also sorry for him and was torn between his wish to live with his mother and concern about his



father. In this case it was not so much that the boy's beliefs about the family were dysfunctional, but that he needed to disengage himself from the demands of each parent.

The present results show that parent-child relationships are intimately linked to self-image, and that these processes are long-term and therefore probably resistant to change. Intervention to improve relationships may be possible, either through individual or family therapy. The link found between poor adjustment and parental overprotection in the present study suggests that therapy aimed at freeing up an enmeshed family system or sub-system may be especially appropriate at adolescence. Family systems therapy, working with the family as a whole, takes account of the interactive nature of family relationships, seeking for changes that will enhance both parent-to-child and child-to-parent relationships. Alternatively, individual therapy could be effective in improving the self-image of an adolescent with the hope of increasing long-term coping strength.

This study has reiterated the importance of independence needs at adolescence, and drawn attention to the inter-relationship between care and overprotection. These results may serve to counter-balance the emphasis in past research on problems of under-control, especially among boys, by indicating that over-restrictive parenting practices are deleterious, and appear to undermine self-concept and reduce coping ability among both boys and girls.

A counselling issue that is relevant to the last point is that of the desirability (or otherwise) of a hierarchical family structure, with clearly defined generational boundaries. As discussed in Chapter 8, this type of family structure, whether in divorced or intact families is regarded as desirable by psychoanalytic writers. Structural family systems theorists also stress the need for hierarchy, although Minuchin (1974) acknowledges that non-traditional structural forms can also function satisfactorily. The present results suggest that theoretical precepts about desirable structural arrangements should be invoked flexibly. Different solutions seem to work for different families, and much depends on the degree to which parents and adolescents have transformed a dependent relationship into one of mutuality, finding an age-appropriate balance between freedom and supervision.

Our results show that school adjustment may be affected by family crisis, but performance appears to improve following decrease in conflict. Poor school-work or behaviour problems may be indicators of problems at home, whether in unhappy intact

families or after separation. For many children they seem to be a reaction to family crisis, requiring special support during a difficult period, but not warranting expectation of long-term maladjustment provided the stress is relieved. Teachers can be of great help to children during this time, but should be aware of the finding that it is not divorced or intact family structure, but the nature of current family processes that is implicated in poor adjustment. A stereotypic view of an adolescent as disturbed because he or she comes from a "broken home" may act as a self-fulfilling prophesy, or obscure other causes requiring professional help.

### Legal Procedures and Practices

Policies which reduce the exposure of children and adolescents to family conflict are desirable, given the strong evidence here and in other studies of its ill effects.

The Australian Family Law Act (1975) seeks to encourage parents to avoid litigation over matters such as custody, access and property settlement, and provides a counselling service for those needing help in reaching mutual agreement. Unfortunately the adversarial nature of common law cuts across this admirable policy, and lawyers do not necessarily follow the spirit of the law in seeking to further their clients' interests. Measures would be desirable to ensure that solicitors and others working in this jurisdiction understand the ill-effects on children of drawn out conflict and act within the letter and the spirit of the law.

Lengthy court delays in hearing property settlements and other divorce-related matters are also likely to prolong family tension and hostility between parents. Reduction of delays by provision of adequate court services should be an urgent priority.

The practice of allowing "separation under the same roof" for all or part of the twelve month period prior to divorce is allowed under the Act. It is recognised that this has arisen for pragmatic reasons in a period of high housing costs, but inherent danger to children from escalating levels of hostility is clear from the present study. All except one of the cases where injunctions were taken out restraining partners from violence involved this living arrangement. It is therefore recommended that problems with this arrangement should be pointed out to court clients and the practice should be discouraged except in special circumstances.

Finally, the present results highlight the importance to adolescents of the quality of their relationship with parents. Access arrangements should take account of the finding that continued contact with both parents is highly desirable provided the relationship is a good one. Similarly, it is the quality of the relationship with the custodial parent, rather than his or her gender which is associated with good adjustment. Where judicial determinations have to be made on custody and access issues the dimensions of parenting found in this study to be linked to adolescent wellbeing should be considered.

The generally positive levels of adolescent adjustment over three years, and high satisfaction with custody arrangements of the present sample (89 per cent), suggest that the Family Law Act has served this group of families well. It is to be hoped that future amendments to the Act strengthen rather than weaken expression of the spirit in which it was conceived.

#### Further Research

A number of issues arising from the present study merit further research. These include further longitudinal investigation of vulnerability and resilience in children; an attempt to specify the relationships between family conflict, dimensions of parent-child interactions and child outcomes in more detail; and a more detailed examination of coping and cognitive development.

The tentative finding that age differences at adolescence may affect those in divorcing families rather more strongly than those in intact families is intriguing since it could imply that divorce is more disturbing in early than in later adolescence. Examination of this issue with a larger sample would be of interest.

In addition the impact of social change, including increasing numbers living in non-traditional families, draws attention to a pressing need for further research focusing on the nature of family processes and the quality of life for children in families whatever their structure.

## Conclusion

The main thesis presented here is that adolescent adjustment is associated with processes within the family rather than with divorced or non-divorced family structure and that understanding of these processes can aid prediction. The data presented above have strongly confirmed this contention, both at the time of the divorce and three years later, showing that parent-child processes conducive to good adjustment cross-cut family structure, and that high levels of conflict are damaging whether parents are together or apart. Continuity in family processes and in adolescent adjustment over three years has been demonstrated, as has prediction from Time 1 to Time 2. Furthermore group results have been shown to provide useful predictive guidelines for individual cases.

This study has benefited from access to a court-based sample and a control group drawn from a similarly broad population. Control of time since final separation and age of adolescents, first contact close to the point of divorce and follow-up three years later have provided a tight time-frame. Use of standard measures has insured objective evaluation and norm comparisons, while interviews gave insight into personal experience. Parental measures and interviews at Time 1 have provided information from an independent source. This study is the only research incorporating all these design features, and is the only known non-clinical longitudinal study sampling adolescents at the point of divorce.

In the course of this research many aspects of family functioning have been examined. Adjustment in both groups at first interview is associated with perceived levels of family happiness and degree of conflict; and strong associations were established between adolescent adjustment and parent-child relationships experienced as highly caring and non-overprotective. Evidence of links between parental psychopathology and child adjustment were found. Among those from divorcing families adjustment was linked to the quality of the relationship, but not the gender, of the custodial parent; and decrease in family conflict was associated with better school and general adjustment. Those with close ties with their fathers experienced a greater degree of emotional distress than those who were not close to him. These feelings, however, did not necessarily indicate lower psychological adjustment.

Few age or sex effects were found, and there were no significant differences in adjustment between those from intact or divorcing homes.

Three years later very similar results again emerged. Current family happiness, conflict and parent-child relationships were all related to adjustment. No significant differences were found on a measure of readiness for intimacy, although interview responses indicate that those from divorced families may be more sexually active. Among this group, custody is no longer significant and adjustment is associated with age rather than divorce response, with higher adjustment among older adolescents. Conflict change and acceptance of the divorce are linked to some aspects of self-image. After three years, feelings about the divorce are still linked to the adolescents' view of the father - those who feel close to him still express sadness, but feeling sad is not related to psychological adjustment.

The predictive analyses show that self-image scores are reasonably constant over three years, and that parental care and overprotection at Time 1 are correlated with scores at Time 2. Self-image at Time 1 (with Time 2 mother care) explains 40 per cent of the variance in Time 2 scores.

The results draw attention to the need to focus on the quality of family life, whether or not both parents are together. A conflict-filled home can make life a misery in the intact family and also following divorce if things have not improved. But a stereotypic view of the child of divorce as potentially deviant does great injustice to the many children and parents who have made a success of the transition from an unhappy marriage. Complacency about the intact family may lead to denial of the needs of children suffering from poor quality relationships or high conflict.

The present results show that adolescents are capable of understanding and compassion and in turn can draw great strength in times of crisis from high quality relationships with parents.

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## APPENDIX 1

## Control Group Characteristics

TABLE A1

Demographic Characteristics of the Population From Which the Control Group Families were Drawn. Number Accepting by School and Percentage of Total Acceptances

High Schools	Number accepting by school	% of total acceptances	% Blue-collar workers in district	% White-collar workers in district	Divorce rate in district*
Leumeah	23	17.8	70.3	29.7	1.9
Strathfield South	19	14.7	60.1	39.9	3.1
St.Ives	24	18.6	26.3	73.7	2.1
Mosman	22	17.1	34.4	65.6	5.0
Ryde	11	8.5	60.2	39.8	2.8
Narrabeen	7	5.4	55.2	44.8	3.6
Rooty Hill	17	13.2	79.8	20.2	2.4
Arthur Phillip, Parramatta	6	4.7	69.9	30.1	3.1

(\* per thousand of population).

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics data as presented by Poulsen and Spearritt (1981).

## APPENDIX 2

### Standard Measures: Validity and Reliability

#### 1. Offer Self-Image Questionnaire OSIQ

Validity. The validity of the OSIQ appears to be satisfactory. Studies by Offer (1969), Coche and Taylor (1974), and Hjorth (1980), cited in Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1981a) find moderate to high correlations between this test and the Bell Inventory, the MMPI and the Tennessee self-concept test. A factor-analytic study by Dudley, Craig and Mason (1981) finds that all the OSIQ scales contribute to a psychopathology factor represented by five MMPI scales. Criterion validity is provided by evidence that boys selected by Offer in 1962 as "normal" on the basis of average ratings on at least nine of the 11 scales are described as having "functioned in psychologically normal ways" over an 8-year follow-up period (Offer et al, 1981a p.144).

All scales except Sexual Attitudes have been found to discriminate between normal and disturbed youngsters (Offer and Howard, 1972). The Sexual Attitudes Scale does, however, discriminate between physically healthy and ill adolescents, with the latter having poorer scores, (Offer et al, 1981a) as Apter, Morein, Munitz, Tyano, Moaz and Wijsenbeek (1978) also report. This scale appears to measure openness to sexuality rather than sexual adjustment per se; its correlation with the other scales is low and the authors recommend its exclusion from the total Self-Image score, a course which has been adopted here.

Concurrent validity for the Body and Self-Image scale is also provided by studies with the physically ill (Offer et al, 1981a), who score worse than their healthy peers on this scale. These authors also report findings which confirm the validity of scales measuring the social self (delinquents score worse on Morals and Vocational and Educational Goals and psychiatric patients have disturbed Social and Vocational attitudes), Family Relations (both delinquents and disturbed adolescents report poorer relations with their families), and the Psychological Self and Coping scales (again the delinquent and disturbed groups score less well).

Reliability. The scales are moderately highly correlated with one another, suggesting that the total score may provide the best overall measure to use in MANOVA analyses. However, the scales are sufficiently differentiated to justify their retention. Their internal

reliability is reported as varying between between  $\alpha = .58$  (Morals) and  $\alpha = .88$  (Family Relationships) by Offer, Ostrov and Howard, (1977a). While alphas as low as .58 are regarded as poor, more recent scale revision has improved these levels.

Test-retest reliability for a 1979 Chicago sample over six months ranged from .48 to .84 for scales, and was .73 for the total score (Offer et al, 1981a). An 18 month test-retest study found Morals to be the weakest scale (correlation coefficients ranging from .31 to .63 across groups differentiated by age and sex). Excluding this scale, Rs range from .38 to .81, with most scales demonstrating moderate to good reliability (OSIQ Newsletter, March 1984).

## 2. The Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ)

Validity. The NSQ was developed empirically from items from the 16PF test distinguishing between "neurotic" and "normal" samples, so defined on psychiatric criteria. It was then administered to 102 clinically judged neurotics at 10 different centres, whose total scores were found to differ from a control group of "normals" at  $p < .0005$ . Other evidence of construct validity is presented in Scheier and Cattell (1961).

Reliability. While inter-scale correlations are low, demonstrating the independence of the four scales, the internal reliability of the total test score is .67. The scales used as outcome measures in the present research have reliability co-efficients of .57 (Depression) and .70 (Anxiety), (Scheier and Cattell (1961).

A factor-analytic Australian study (Vagg, Stanley and Hammond, 1972) throws some doubt on the invariance of the structure of this measure across the sexes, but demonstrates the existence of two higher order factors which are sex-stable and which the writers see as representing dimensions of introversion-extraversion and neuroticism. Inspection of the items making up these factors show that Factor 1 is largely composed of Depression scale items, while Factor 2 has a preponderance of Anxiety Scale items. From this it seems that these scales may be rather more robust than the other two.

## 3. Parent Bonding Inventory (PBI)

Validity. Parker predicted on theoretical grounds that good adjustment would be associated with optimal bonding and that children brought up by parents in the affectionless control quadrant would have a higher probability of psychiatric problems in adulthood.

Criterion validity for the scales is demonstrated by a series of studies with young adult psychiatric patients and controls, showing significantly lower Care scores and higher Overprotection scores for psychiatric patients than for controls, (Parker, 1979; Parker, Fairley, Greenwood, Jurd and Silove, 1982). Examination of combinations of these characteristics by use of quadrants showed that affectionless control in childhood predicted rates of adult neurotic depression, but not bi-polar depression or schizophrenia (Parker, op. cit., Parker et al., op. cit). Using a non-clinical sample, placement of parents in these quadrants also differentiated between subjects on measures of depression, self-esteem and neuroticism (Parker, op. cit). Considerable other evidence of the nature and suitability of this measure is presented in Parker, 1983.

Further studies have tested the validity of the assumption that actual parenting characteristics are being measured, since it is possible that adult depressives rating parents retrospectively might be influenced by their current mood. Parker (1981) found no differences in scores if patients re-rated their parents when experiencing different levels of depression; high correlations between depressed patients' assessments of parents and ratings made by their non-depressed siblings of patient/parent relations; and significant correlations between subjects' ratings of mothers and mothers' self-ratings of their handling of their children. These studies point towards the validity of the measure as one of actual parenting style.

In examining the aetiology of depression it was important for Parker to assess the veridicality of this instrument, however this issue is less salient if the measure is used as an indication of a subject's perception of parent-child relationships. While it is reasonable to suppose that an adolescent's opinion is based on actual experience, ultimately it is his or her perception of family interaction that is likely to affect current self-image.

Reliability. Parker, Tupling and Brown (1979) and Parker (1983) report satisfactory test-retest and split half reliability levels.

#### 4. Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Validity. Spanier (1976) reports that each item on the scale differentiated between divorced and married couples, and mean dyadic adjustment totals were significantly different for each group. Correlation with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale was  $r = .86$

for married and  $r = .88$  for divorced subjects; and factor analysis produced four dimensions in agreement with theoretical expectation.

Confirmatory factor analyses by Spanier and Thompson (1982) and Antill and Cotton (1982) endorse the usefulness of the scale. Antill and Cotton recommend its use for Australian samples, finding support for three of the scales although they find the Affectional Expression scale to be weaker. They note that the total 32 items tend to form a single factor, as do Sharpley and Cross (1982) who also endorse it for Australian use, but state that its main strength lies in its overall "dyadic adjustment" dimension.

Reliability. Spanier reports internal reliability for the scales ranging from .73 to .96. and Sharpley and Cross (1982) replicate Spanier's figure for overall reliability. No information could be found on test-retest or split form reliability.

##### 5. Erikson Psychosocial Inventory Scale (EPSI)

Validity. Construct validity for the EPSI is provided by Rosenthal et al. (1981) in a series of correlations between their subscales and those of Greenberger and Sorensen's Psycho-Social Maturity Scale (1974). The Intimacy Scale is correlated with Self-reliance ( $r = .46$ ), Communication ( $r = .39$ ) and Tolerance ( $r = .48$ ), indicating commonality in a realm of maturity/interpersonal relationships. They also report some success in operationalizing Erikson's developmental sequence, in that older students scored higher on each of the subscales. Differences between Year 9 and Year 11 students on the Intimacy Scale were at a probability of less than .001.

Reliability. The authors report internal reliability on the Intimacy subscale as  $\alpha = .73$  on a pilot test ( $n = 97$ ), and .63 on a test sample ( $n = 622$ ).

## APPENDIX 3

**Time 1 Psychometric Measures:  
Descriptive Statistics and Norm Comparisons**

**1. Adolescent data**

TABLE A3.1.

Time 1 Norm Comparisons Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) Subscales and Total:  
Australian Male Adolescents Versus Intact and Divorced Group Males (Two-Tail Z Test)

Scale	Norm		Intact group		Divorced group	
	(n = 687)		(n = 21)		(n = 18)	
	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d
Impulse control	2.43	.81	2.62	.67	2.70	.48
Emotional tone	2.29	.78	2.19	.70	2.18	.64
Body and self-image	2.68	.80	2.69	.69	2.60	.76
Social relationships	2.31	.79	2.34	.57	2.30	.67
Morals	2.55	.67	2.74	.58	2.56	.46
Sexual attitudes	2.52	.82	2.90*	.68	2.60	.51
Family relationships	2.33	.75	2.30	.64	2.49	.81
Mastery of the external world	2.45	.66	2.41	.52	2.41	.72
Vocational and educational goals	1.99	.64	1.92	.64	2.01	.63
Psychopathology	2.51	.69	2.44	.67	2.33	.64
Superior adjustment	2.66	.59	2.68	.53	2.62	.43
Offer total	2.42	.52	2.43	.44	2.42	.43

(\*  $p < .05$ ).

Note: Following the practice of Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1977a), the sexual attitudes scores are omitted from the total Offer score. Lower scores denote better adjustment.

Source: Australian norms from Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1977b).

TABLE A3.2

Time 1 Norm Comparisons Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) Subscales and  
Total: Australian Female Adolescents Versus Intact and Divorced Group Females  
(Two-Tail Z Test)

	(n = 687)		(n = 19)		(n = 16)	
	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d
Impulse control	2.70	.83	2.83	.70	2.86	.62
Emotional tone	2.64	.86	2.33	.76	2.39	.75
Body and self-image	2.92	.83	2.76	.81	2.97	.87
Social relationships	2.48	.83	2.50	.70	2.47	.66
Morals	2.37	.69	2.46	.60	2.37	.61
Sexual attitudes	2.94	.80	3.35**	.78	2.83	.82
Family relationship	2.49	.90	2.20	.85	2.43	.53
Mastery of the external world	2.58	.66	2.54	.58	2.38	.44
Vocational and educational goals	2.05	.60	1.99	.54	2.19	.44
Psychopathology	2.70	.71	2.70	.65	2.46	.59
Superior adjustment	2.74	.57	2.70	.50	2.78	.56
Offer total	2.57	.52	2.50	.44	2.53	.46

(\* \* p < .01).

Note: Following the practice of Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1977a), the sexual attitudes scores are omitted from the total Offer score. Lower scores denote better adjustment.

Source: Australian norms from Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1977b).

TABLE A3.3

Time 1 Norm Comparisons: Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ) Depression Subscale:  
American Adults Versus Intact and Divorced Group Adolescent Males and Females  
(Two-Tail Z Test)

	Norm (n = 675)		Intact group (n = 22)		Divorced group (n = 19)	
	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d
Males	9.4	2.8	8.05	3.15	9.21	3.90
	(n = 393)		(n = 19)		(n = 17)	
Females	9.8	2.8	8.53*	3.72	6.77***	3.55

(\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .001).

Note: These norms are based on an American population whose mean age is 31 years. Mean raw scores are reported, lower scores denoting better adjustment.

Source: Norms are from Scheier and Cattell (1961).

TABLE A3.4

Time 1 Norm Comparisons: Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ) Anxiety Subscale:  
American Adults Versus Intact and Divorced Group Adolescent Males and Females  
(Two-Tail Z Test)

	Norm (n = 675)		Intact group (n = 22)		Divorced group (n = 19)	
	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d
Males	9.8	3.4	10.41	3.69	12.37***	3.75
	(n = 393)		(n = 19)		(n = 17)	
Females	9.8	3.4	12.11**	3.04	10.94	2.73

(\*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001).

Note: These norms are based on an American population whose mean age is 31 years. Mean raw scores are reported, lower scores denoting better adjustment.

Source: Norms are from Scheier and Cattell (1961).



TABLE A3.5

Time 1 Norm Comparisons: Parent Bonding Inventory (PBI) Subscales:  
Australian Adults Versus Intact and Divorced group adolescents  
(Two-tail Z Tests)

Scales	Norm (n = 410)		Intact group (n=41)		Divorced group (n=36)	
	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d
Mother Care	26.9	7.3	29.10	5.81	29.31*	4.60
Father Care	23.8	7.6	27.25*	6.57	22.31	8.41
Mother Overprotection	13.3	7.4	12.73	8.16	11.66	7.41
Father Overprotection	12.4	7.4	11.98	8.2	12.00	7.36

(\* p < .05)

Note: Norms are based on scores of Australian adults rating parents retrospectively. High care and low overprotection scores denote satisfactory bonding.

Source: Norms are from Parker (1983), Sydney general practice sample.

TABLE A3.6

Time 1 : Correlation Matrix (Pearson's R)  
Parent Bonding Inventory Scales

	Mother Care	Mother Overprotection	Father Care	Father Overprotection
Mother Care		-.51 p = .000	.29 p = .006	-.26 p = .012
Mother Overprotection			-.19 p = .052	.33 p = .002
Father Care				-.44 p = .000

## 2. Parental data

TABLE A 3.7

Norm Comparisons: Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale,  
Australian Married Couples Versus Control Group Parents  
(Two-Tail Z Test)

Scale	Males				Females			
	Norm (n = 108)		Control group (n = 39)		Norm (n = 108)		Control group (n = 41)	
	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d
Consensus	48.2	6.2	51.8***	5.1	49.4	7.2	51.5	6.8
Affection	8.6	2.0	10.1***	1.6	8.9	2.0	12.1***	3.7
Satisfaction	39.6	4.3	41.2*	4.9	38.7	6.1	40.7	5.1
Cohesion	15.2	4.2	16.9*	4.0	15.7	3.8	15.0	3.9
Total	111.6	13.5	117.3*	14.3	112.7	15.5	113.9	13.3

(\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ).

Note: Higher scores denote greater marital satisfaction.

Source: Australian norms used were from Antill and Cotton (1982).

TABLE A3.8

Time 1 Norm Comparisons: Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire Depression Subscale:  
American Norms Versus Intact and Divorced Group Mothers and Fathers (Two-Tail Z Test)

	Norm (n = 675)		Intact group (n = 39)		Divorced group (n = 23)	
Males	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d
	9.4	2.8	9.6	3.0	11.2***	2.5
Females	(n = 393)		(n = 41)		(n = 30)	
	9.8	2.8	10.6	3.6	9.5	3.1

(\*\*\*  $p < .001$ ).

Note: These norms are based on an American adult population. Mean raw scores are reported, lower scores denoting better adjustment.

Source: Norms are from Scheier and Cattell (1961).

TABLE A3.9

Time 1 Norm Comparisons: Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire  
Anxiety Subscale: American Norms Versus Intact and Divorced Group Parents  
(Two-Tail Z Test)

	Norm (n = 675)		Intact group (n = 22)		Divorced group (n = 19)	
Males	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d
	9.8	3.4	9.2	4.3	10.7	3.43
Female	(n = 393)		(n = 41)		(n = 30)	
	9.8	3.4	10.1	3.9	11.9***	3.8

(\*\*\* p < .001)

Note: These norms are based on an American adult population. Mean raw scores are reported, lower scores denoting better adjustment.

Source: Norms are from Scheier and Cattell (1961).

TABLE A3.10

Time 1 Norm Comparisons: Langner Twenty-two Item Screening Score:  
American Norms Versus Intact and Divorced Group Parents (Two-Tail Z Test)

	Norm (n = 1438)		Intact group (n = 22)		Divorced group (n = 19)	
Fathers	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d
	2.6	2.8	2.3	2.6	2.6	2.7
Mothers	(n = 1438)		(n = 41)		(n = 30)	
	2.6	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.9**	3.0

(\*\* p < .01)

Note: Langner's normative sample includes both men and women. Higher scores indicate more psychiatric symptoms.

Source: Langner (1962).

### 3. Norm Comparisons Time 1: Discussion

The norm comparisons provide information about the representativeness of the control group and allow the results of the between and within group analyses reported in the text to be interpreted in the light of normative data. In the tables presented above two-tail p-values have been recorded. No Bonferroni corrections have been made to correct for Type 1 errors when multiple comparisons are made. Thus, in interpreting individual tables a probability of .05 is best seen as indicating a trend rather than a significant result.

From the tables it can be seen that the control group means are similar to those of normative samples in most respects. Of the OSIQ total and individual scales, only the girls' sexual attitudes scores differ significantly. The authors recommend that this scale be omitted from the total score as it does not correlate with other measures of psychological adjustment and seems rather to measure psychosexual development.

Adult norms had to be used for the NSQ scales. Control group boys do not differ; the girls are less depressed but more anxious than American adult females.

The PBI subscales are also based on adult norms. Control group fathers are seen as somewhat more caring than those of the normative sample of Australian adults who rated their parents retrospectively. Mother's care means are also high but approach significance only for the divorcing group.

The control group fathers rate their marital satisfaction more highly than those in the Australian study by Antill and Cotton (1982), but mothers differ only on the affection subscale.

On the measures of psychological adjustment (NSQ subscales and Langner score), the control group parents resemble the adult American normative population.

These analyses have shown that the intact families provide a satisfactory comparison group for the present study. On a range of standard measures their scores differ little from population norms, and where differences have emerged they mainly provide a higher (rather than lower) standard of comparison from which to evaluate the adjustment of the adolescents from divorcing families.

# APPENDIX 4

## Parents' Appraisal Scale

TABLE A4.1

Correlation Matrix : Parents' Appraisal Subscales by Selected OSIQ Subscales

	Empathic	Self-reliant	Responsible	Independent	Co-operative	Decisive
Impulse control	.125 p = .14	.191 p = .05	.265 p = .01	.163 p = .08	.167 p = .08	.302 p = .00
Social relationships	.20 p = .05	.21 p = .04	.23 p = .03	.10 p = .22	.08 p = .26	.13 p = .13
Sexual attitudes	-.04 p = .37	.05 p = .35	-.18 p = .0	-.24 p = .0	-.24 p = .0	-.07 p = .28
Family relationships	.21 p = .04	.12 p = .15	.39 p = .00	.27 p = .01	.44 p = .00	.09 p = .23
Mastery of the external world	.21 p = .04	.34 p = .00	.15 p = .10	.18 p = .06	.09 p = .2	.13 p = .13
Vocational and educational goals	.17 p = .07	.29 p = .01	.12 p = .15	.23 p = .02	.12 p = .15	.17 p = .07
Superior adjustment	.20 p = .04	.46 p = .00	.20 p = .04	.16 p = .09	.19 p = .05	.23 p = .02
Offer Total	.23 p = .03	.27 p = .01	.28 p = .01	.17 p = .08	.25 p = .02	.20 p = .05

TABLE 4.2

Parents' Appraisal Scale Total: Means and Standard deviations  
by Sex and Family Group

	Intact			Divorced		
	$\bar{X}$	s d	n	$\bar{X}$	s d	n
Boys	29.46	7.05	22	29.16	6.13	19
Girls	28.63	7.97	19	30.44	7.18	18

Note: Lower scores denote better adjustment.

## APPENDIX 5

**Time 2**  
**Standard Psychometric Measures: Descriptive Statistics and Norm Comparisons.**

**1. Adolescent Data**

TABLE A5.1.

Time 2 Norm Comparisons: Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) Subscales and Total, Australian Male Adolescents Versus Intact and Divorced Group Males  
(Two-Tail Z Test)

Scale	Norm (n = 687)		Intact group (n = 19)		Divorced group (n = 14)	
	$\bar{x}$	s d	$\bar{x}$	s d	$\bar{x}$	s d
Impulse control	2.43	.81	2.68	.51	2.79	.66
Emotional tone	2.29	.78	2.20	.78	2.22	.60
Body and self-image	2.68	.80	2.46	.89	2.68	.75
Social relationships	2.31	.79	2.47	.68	2.41	.60
Morals	2.55	.67	2.36	.37	2.39	.57
Sexual attitudes	2.52	.82	2.54	.66	2.34	.55
Family relationships	2.33	.75	2.21	.89	2.63	.55
Mastery of the external world	2.45	.66	2.51	.69	2.40	.70
Vocational and educational goals	1.99	.64	2.21	.36	2.34*	.52
Psychopathology	2.51	.69	2.29	.8	2.27	.66
Superior adjustment	2.66	.59	2.48	.44	2.27*	.45
Offer total	2.42	.52	2.38	.48	2.49	.45

(\*  $p < .05$ ).

Note: Following the practice of Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1977a), the sexual attitudes scores are omitted from the total Offer score. Lower scores indicate better adjustment.

Source: Australian norms from Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1977b.)

TABLE A5.2

Time 2 Norm Comparisons: Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) Subscales and Total, Australian Female Adolescents Versus Intact and Divorced Group Females  
(Two-Tail Z Test)

Scale	Norm (n = 687)		Intact group (n = 15)		Divorced group (n = 15)	
	$\bar{x}$	s d	$\bar{x}$	s d	$\bar{x}$	s d
Impulse control	2.70	.83	2.70	.48	2.94	.64
Emotional tone	2.64	.86	2.40	.72	2.55	.60
Body and self-image	2.92	.83	2.88	.55	2.68	.40
Social relationships	2.48	.83	2.38	.67	2.60	.57
Morals	2.37	.69	2.37	.37	2.40	.47
Sexual attitudes	2.94	.80	2.92	.63	2.42*	.71
Family relationships	2.49	.90	2.26	.93	2.30	.71
Mastery of the external world	2.58	.66	2.41	.61	2.24	.45
Vocational and educational goals	2.05	.60	2.30	.38	2.32	.53
Psychopathology	2.70	.71	2.65	.74	2.24*	.41
Superior adjustment	2.74	.57	2.58	.47	2.55	.31
Offer total	2.57	.52	2.49	.37	2.48	.30

(\* p < .05)

Note: Following the practice of Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1977a), the sexual attitudes scores are omitted from the total Offer score. Lower scores indicate better adjustment.

Source: Australian norms from Offer, Ostrov and Howard (1977b.)

TABLE A5.3

Time 2 Norm Comparisons: Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire  
Depression Subscale, American Adults Versus Intact and Divorced Group Adolescent  
Males and Females (Two-Tail Z Test)

	Norm			Intact			Divorced		
	$\bar{X}$	s d	n	$\bar{X}$	s d	n	$\bar{X}$	s d	n
Males	9.4	2.8	675	7.26***	4.36	19	7.29**	4.01	14
Females	9.8	2.8	393	7.53**	4.37	15	7.20***	3.36	15

(\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ )

Note: These norms are based on an American population whose mean age is 31 years. Mean raw scores are reported, lower scores denoting better adjustment.

Source: Norms are from Scheier and Cattell (1961).

TABLE A5.4

Time 2 Norm Comparisons: Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire  
Anxiety Subscale, American Adults Versus Intact and Divorced Group Adolescent  
Males and Females

	Norm			Intact			Divorced		
	$\bar{X}$	s d	n	$\bar{X}$	s d	n	$\bar{X}$	s d	n
Males	9.8	3.4	675	10.47	3.86	19	9.86	3.33	14
Females	9.8	3.4	393	11.87*	3.68	15	12.20*	2.48	15

(\*  $p < .05$ )

Note: These norms are based on an American population whose mean age is 31 years. Mean raw scores are reported, lower scores denoting better adjustment.

Source: Norms are from Scheier and Cattell (1961).



TABLE A5.5

Time 2 Norm Comparisons: Parent Bonding Inventory (PBI) Subscales, Australian Adults Versus Intact and Divorced Group Adolescents  
(Two-Tail Z Test)

Scales	Norm (n=410)		Intact group (n=35)		Divorced group (n=30)	
	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d
Mother Care	26.9	7.3	29.51	5.60	29.57*	5.0
Father Care	23.8	7.4	27.71**	6.26	21.20*	9.11
Mother Overprotection	13.3	7.6	11.23	7.18	7.93***	6.95
Father Overprotection	12.4	7.4	9.71*	7.53	7.93***	8.51

(\*p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001)

Note: Norms are based on scores of Australian adults rating parents retrospectively. High care and low overprotection scores denote good bonding.

Source: Parker (1983), Sydney general practice sample.

TABLE A5.6

Time 2: Correlation Matrix (Pearson's R)  
Parent Bonding Inventory Scales

	Mother Care	Mother Overprotection	Father Care	Father Overprotection
Mother Care		-.54 p = .000	.29 p = .009	-.40 p = .001
Mother Overprotection			-.16 p = .10	.47 p = .000
Father Care				-.40 p = .000

TABLE A5.7

Erikson Psychosocial Inventory Scale: Intimacy Subscale,  
Melbourne Grade 11 Adolescents, Versus Time 2 Sample,  
by Sex and Family Group

	Norm		Intact group		Divorced group	
	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d	$\bar{X}$	s d
Males	3.45	.58	3.92	.60	3.76	.66
Females	3.67	.55	3.77	.61	3.67	.51

Note: Higher scores indicate greater readiness for intimacy. The Melbourne adolescents were aged 16 to 17, and the Sydney sample were 16 to 19. Higher scores with increased age would be predicted. One item was omitted in Sydney so a statistical comparison was not undertaken.

Source: Rosenthal, Gurney and Moore (1981).

## 2. Norm Comparisons Time 2: Discussion

Three years after the first interview, as at Time 1, there are few differences between OSIQ norms and mean scores for the present sample. These older adolescents are significantly less depressed than adults on the NSQ depression scale, but both intact and divorced group girls tend to be more anxious. As before, mothers tend to be seen as somewhat more caring while mean care ratings for fathers are above the norm in the control group but below in those from divorced families. Parental overprotection scores tend to be lower than the norm with a strong effect for divorced mothers and fathers. No statistical comparison was carried out on the EPSI scale as it was modified for its present use.

## APPENDIX 6

## Time 1 Interview Items Used in Analyses

TABLE A6.1

Time 1 Interview Items Used in Process of Constructing Feelings, Acceptance,  
Conflict Change and Divorce Response Scales

- 8.8. Now that they have separated do you think your parents get on better, about the same or do they disagree more than before?
- 8.10. Here is a sheet with some of the ways that teenagers sometimes feel when their parents separate. Could you fill it in for me? You can add your own ideas where we have written "other".
- Tick the box which shows whether you feel or felt any of these things very strongly, fairly strongly, a little bit or not at all.
- |                         |                                  |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Sad                     | Refuse to accept it              |
| Relieved                | Shocked                          |
| Angry with one parent   | Upset at first, now O.K.         |
| Angry with both parents | Still upset, but accept decision |
| Can't believe it        | Want parents to re-unite         |
| Glad                    | Felt rejected                    |
| Wonder if I'm to blame  | Other                            |
| Don't care              |                                  |
- 10.4. Here is a list of changes that sometimes affect teenagers when their parents separate. Could you tell me if any of these changes have happened in your family? ( items answered yes/no)
- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Teenager no longer living at home        | Can't keep old pets         |
| Teenager living with only one parent     | Changed schools             |
| Less tension/ fighting in family         | Lost touch with old friends |
| Family happier than before separation    | Gained new friends          |
| Family less happy than before separation | Moved to new house          |
| Family has less money                    | Moved to new district       |
| Spend more time away from home           | Mother now working          |
| Teenager has more household tasks        | New partner for father      |
| Teenager now has part-time job           | New partner for mother      |
| Brothers and sisters not all together    | New kids in family          |
| Home not as organised as it used to be   | Other                       |
- 13.6. Would you like your parents to get back together again? (three-point response)
- 13.9. Overall, do you think things have been better or worse in your family since the separation? (three-point response)
- 14.9. Most families have quarrels sometimes. Do the members of your family fight much? would you say there is a lot, a medium amount or not much fighting in your family now?
- 17.4. Taking all things together, how happy would you say your family is at present? would you say it's very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy these days?

TABLE A6.2

Time 1 Items Correlating with Time 1 Divorce Response Scale  $p < .009$ 

- 2.10. Do your parents know most of your friends? or do you like to keep your home life and friendships separate? Do your parents know all, most, few or none?
- 8.2. Did you expect that your parents might decide to separate, or was it quite a shock to you? (A big shock, a medium shock, no shock.)
- 10.4. Here is a list of changes that sometimes affect teenagers when their parents separate. Could you tell me if any of these changes have happened in your family? (Yes, No)
- d. Family happier than before the separation.
- 11.9. Do you enjoy your visits to your father? (Yes, No.)
- 11.13. Do you sometimes have to visit your father when you would rather not go? (No, Sometimes, Always.)
- 13.6. Would you like your parents to get back together again? (Yes, Don't know, No.)
- 14.4. Here's a game called "Eggs in a Basket". Here are four baskets - one each for you, your mother, and your father. Here are 12 China eggs which I'm going to put in your basket. Now I want you to tell me how much of yourself you give to your mother and your father and how much you keep for yourself and your interests and friends outside the family. Take some eggs out of your basket and put them in the other baskets to show me how much of yourself you give and how much you keep. (Scored out of 12.)
- 16.10. Do you and your father understand each other well? (Yes, Sometimes, No.)
- 16.19. In general do you think you get on better, the same or worse with your father than you did one year ago?
- 17.1. Here are some problems that some teenagers have. Could you tell me if any of these are problems for you? Tell me if they are a major worry, quite a problem, a little worrying, or no problem.
- a) The struggle for more independence from parents.
- b) Dissatisfaction with the way you're making out with the opposite sex.

## APPENDIX 7

## Time 2 Interview Items Used in Analyses

TABLE A7.1

Time 2 Items Correlating with Time 2 Divorce Response Scale at  $p < .009$ .

39. Do you ever do anything that's a bit beyond the legal limits? (Remember all your replies are completely confidential.) (3-pt response: Yes, Sort of, No.)
40. Have you been in trouble with the police at all? (Yes, No.)
50. Since the separation has your contact with your father increased, remained the same or decreased? Was this through your own choice (Yes, No.)
- 83.. Here are three baskets - one for you, one for your mother and one for your father. Here are 12 China eggs which I'm going to put in your basket. Now I want you to tell me how much of yourself you give to your mother and your father and how much you keep for yourself and your friends and interests outside the family. (Score out of 12.)
108. When you are a parent will you handle your own children in much the same way as your father handles you or will you handle them differently? (Exactly the same, Similar in most things, Different in most things, Different in everything I can think of.)
111. Here is a list of problems some teenagers have. Could you tell me if any are a problem for you? Tell me if they are a major worry, a considerable worry, slightly worrying, or no worry at all.

a) The struggle for more independence from parents.

The following Parent Bonding Scale items (4-pt scale):

14. (My father) does not seem to understand what I need or want.
15. (My father) does (not) let me decide things for myself.
17. (My father) can (not) make me feel better when I'm upset.
18. (My father) does not talk to me very much.

TABLE A7.2

Time 2 Items Correlating with Offer Self-Image Scale at  $p < .009$

111. Here is a list of problems some teenagers have. Could you tell me if any are a problem for you? Tell me if they are a major worry, a considerable worry, slightly worrying, or no worry at all.
  - c) Your career - what you are going to do or whether you will make the grade.
  - e) Uncertainty about what you believe in. What is right or wrong may not be so easy to be sure about.

TABLE A7.3

Time 2 Items Concerning Heterosexual Relationships

26. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your present boy/girl friend?  
(scaled 1-5)
28. Do you mind telling me the closest you have been in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex?  
(hand card)
1. Fun to be with as a companion. 2. Hold hands and sometimes kiss. 3. Cuddle and kiss quite a lot. 4. Close intimacy but not full sex. 5. Close intimacy and full sex.
29. Do you think you will want to get married some day?  
(Yes, Don't Know, No)
31. Looking ahead, what attracts you to, or puts you off the idea of marriage?
35. What are your views about living together, that is, in a de facto relationship?
36. How many of your close friends have parents who are separated or divorced?

## APPENDIX 8

## Standard measures: Four case histories

TABLE A8.1

Selected Cases by Scores on Standard Measures

	OSIQ Total	NSQ Dep	NSQ Anx	Mother Care	Father Care	Mother O/Prot	Father O/Prot	Mother NSQ	Father NSQ
Richard									
T1	1.75	7	8	33	13	6	3	7	4
T2	1.95	2	6	30	28	6	4	-	-
Mark									
T1	2.95	8	9	23	24	13	9	8	4
T2	2.78	5	5	26	21	17	6	-	-
Felicity									
T1	3.16	4	9	31	24	11	11	4	8
T2	2.75	4	9	26	27	9	14	-	-
Ruth									
T1	1.83	2	5	33	-	7	-	6	-
T2	2.52	4	9	33	28	7	6	-	-
Norms									
(m)	2.42	5	5	27	24	13.5	12.5	5	5
(f)	2.57	5	5	27	24	13.5	12.5	5	5

Note: Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire sten scores (i.e. standard scores) have been adopted for this table for ease of comparison (Scheier & Cattell, 1961).

