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OLDER PARENTS' REACTIONS AND ADJUSTMENT
TO THEIR CHILD'S MARITAL SEPARATION

by

Jane Leslie Pearson

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

OLDER PARENTS' REACTIONS AND ADJUSTMENT
TO THEIR CHILD'S MARITAL SEPARATION

By

Jane Leslie Pearson

Research on how marital disruption impacts the persons experiencing it, and how children of divorced parents react and adjust has been accumulating. However, little is known about how the parents of the adults experiencing the marital discord react and adjust to the event. The purpose of this study was to expand the limited information on older parents' reactions, coping, and adjustment to their child's marital separation.

Fourteen fathers and 29 mothers of adults who had recently maritally separated responded to a questionnaire asking information on how they had initially reacted, coped, and adjusted to the separation. Additional information hypothesized to impact reactions, coping, and adjustment was also gathered. Specific variables of interest that were measured included parents' demographics, past experience with marital discord, perceptions of the separated child's situation, quality of relationships with child and child-in-law both prior to and since the separation, reactions listed in parents' own words and responses to a list of reactions, ways of coping listed in parents' own words and responses to a list of coping behaviors, social support-- including aspects of support satisfaction, proportion of family members, and members' marital history, and adjustment measures of life satisfaction, depression, and physical symptomology.

The results of descriptive and inferential analyses on these measures resulted in the following conclusions: In general, the marital separation of a child had a negative effect on their parent. Parents varied in their intensity of reactions according to perceived financial burden, conflicting religious convictions, and presence of grandchildren. The most common reactions felt by parents included "loss", "concern", and "sadness", Only a few reported "relief". One factor that related to lower intensity of reactions was parents' prior knowledge of their child's marital problems. Parents attempted to cope with this event through many means, the most common being communicating with their child, and prayer. Based on responses to a list of coping behaviors, clusters of Active coping and Avoidance coping were identified. Active coping was most beneficial in terms of depressive and psychophysiological adjustment, and Avoidance coping was somewhat detrimental to reports of current life satisfaction. In regard to social support, parents who had a high percentage of family members in their support network, as well as parents who were satisfied with support, had less symptomatic adjustment scores.

Implications for future research on this topic, as well as implications for marital and family therapy are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The study described here explored the impact of an adult child's marital separation on their older parent. Information was gathered through a mailed questionnaire sent to parents whose child had separated within the last year. Specific variables of interest that were obtained included the parents' demographics, past experience with marital discord, perceptions of the separated child's situation, quality of relationship with their child and with their child-in-law, parent's reactions, ways of coping, types of social support received, life satisfaction, and psychological and physical adjustment. This chapter explains the importance of obtaining more information on this issue.

Research on how divorce impacts the family has been accumulating. Reports have described how a marital disruption affects the persons experiencing it (Albrecht, 1980; Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978) and how the children of divorced parents react and adjust (Kurdeck, 1981; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). However, little research or even speculation exists on how marital discord affects the extended family (Duffy, 1982; Matthews & Sprey 1984), particularly on how the parents of the adults experiencing the marital disruption react and adjust.

The importance of determining what the impact of an adult child's marital disruption is on his or her parents has become increasingly apparent. With the near-normative occurrence of divorce and the increased likelihood of long-term child-parent relationships, dealing with marital disruptions among one's adult children may become a common life event for the older parent. There is little doubt among many family researchers that critical life events experienced by one family

member create involuntary changes for other family members. Riley and Waring (1976) have called these changes "countertransitions"; Klein, Jorgensen and Miller (1979) have called it "developmental reciprocity". The countertransition of adapting to a child's divorce is generally seen as a negative change for the older parent. Eckels (1981), in examining those life events considered stressful for a large sample of older women, found that the divorce of a child was included as a stressful event for three percent of her sample in a one year period.

In contrast, Kaslow and Hyatt (1982) have suggested that marital disruption can become a positive experience for persons in the extended family in the following two ways: (a) The divorced person can serve as a model who successfully deals with a major life crisis; and (b) Existing emotional barriers among family members may be broken during the crisis by the divorcee, and thus lead to new and better relationships. It should be noted that the potential positive growth to be gained by the extended family members may be dependant on either a well-coping divorcee, or the ability to learn through watching what behaviors not to do. In addition, Hagestad, Smyer, and Stierman (1984) have reported that a majority of the divorcees in their study believed that their divorce had not seriously affected the relationship with their parents, and when a change in the relationship was reported, it was in a positive direction. However, it is not clear how long the recall period was for the divorcees, nor was it reported how the parents themselves felt about the event or changes in the relationships. Both of these positive reports also imply an unspecified period of adjustment for the divorcees and their parents.

Without suggesting either positive or negative outcomes, Johnson and Vinick (1982) have suggested numerous factors affecting the potential impact of a child's divorce on their parents. These included the parent's religion, the adult child's previous and current life situations, and the presence of grandchildren. In addition to these factors, Johnson and Vinick (1982) note that parents have "vicarious" feelings for their child who is going through the divorce, and thus parents' feelings may reflect their child's reactions as well. In sum, there is a diversity of speculation regarding the older parent's range of reactions and adjustment to their child's divorce.

Despite the potential demographic and clinical importance of this phenomenon, there are only five studies that address the potential negative impact of an adult child's divorce on the older parent (Ahrons & Bowman, 1981; Johnson, 1983; Johnson & Vinick, 1982; Kahana & Kahana, 1980; Matthews & Sprey, 1984). All but one of these studies (Johnson & Vinick, 1982) have focussed on changes in grandparent-grandchild relations. Two of these studies have included grandmother-grandchild relations only (Ahrons & Bowman, 1981; Johnson, 1983).

General reactions to the marital disruption of their child are described in each of these studies. The types of reactions reported by the older parents included anger, disappointment, frustration, indifference, sadness, relief, and fear of added financial and child care responsibilities. These reports are limited in several ways. These limitations include (a) small samples restricted to grandparents, excluding those older parents without grandchildren, (b) asking subjects to recall reactions that they may have had up to eight years ago, (c) lack of inclusion of psychological or physical adjustment measures, and

(d) no information provided on what social support or coping behaviors the older parents may have used to deal with their reactions.

Purpose

The intent of the present study was to expand the limited information on parents' reactions to their adult child's marital disruption in several ways. First of all, a sample was obtained that was not limited to grandparents. Second, the examination of parents' reactions and adjustment to their adult child's marital disruption was limited to a time period of approximately one year since the separation. This period was selected due to reports that the initial separation period is the most distressful time in the divorce process for the person experiencing the divorce (Albrecht, 1980; Chiriboga, Roberts, & Stein, 1978; Pearlin & Johnson, 1977), and may therefore elicit the most intense or "vicarious" reactions in the parents, and be a time when demands on parents as social supports are the greatest. In addition, the recall period for parents to report on various aspects of their relationships with their child and child-in-law was limited to within two years. Third, the present study has included measures of the parents' psychological and physical adjustment. Fourth, information was sought on what social support and other coping strategies the parents have used to deal with this event. Figure 1 indicates both the circumscribed time period, and the variables that were investigated.

TIME PERIOD	PRIOR TO CHILD'S SEPARATION	IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING CHILD'S SEPARATION	SINCE CHILD'S SEPARATION
PARENTAL PERCEPTION VARIABLES	<u>PARENTS' PRIOR EXPERIENCE/DEMOGRAPHICS</u> age gender education religion occupation experience with self or others' marital disruption income	<u>ADULT CHILD'S SITUATION</u> age gender children (ages) number of previous separations initiator of separation	<u>COPING STRATEGIES USED BY PARENTS</u> activities, e.g., praying, yard work talking with friends, family, professionals
	<u>PRIOR PARENT-CHILD AND PARENT-CHILD-IN-LAW RELATIONS</u>	<u>PARENT'S INITIAL REACTIONS</u> anger guilt dismay concern fear joy shame loss upset sadness	<u>PRESENT PARENT-CHILD AND PARENT-CHILD-IN-LAW RELATIONS</u>
			<u>PARENTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL ADJUSTMENT</u> depression index life satisfaction composite symptom checklist

Figure 1: Variables Examined in Older Parents' Reactions and Adjustment to Their Child's Marital Separation

CHAPTER II

RATIONALE

This chapter describes the variables examined in the study, many of which extend beyond those collected in previous research. Following this listing, a rationale for the variable selection is provided. In order to begin to understand why certain parents may have certain reactions, what they do about these reactions, and how the reactions affect them physically and psychologically, the following aspects of parents' reports of themselves and their separated children were examined:

1. The parents' prior experience and background, specifically age, gender, education, income, occupation, religion, and previous experience with marital disruption;
2. The parents' perception of relations with their child and child-in-law prior to the separation;
3. The parents' perception of the separated child's situation, specifically his or her age, gender, financial situation, number and age of grandchildren, time since the separation, whether it is his or her first separation, and whether he or she initiated the separation, or mutually agreed to it;
4. The parents' range and intensity of initial reactions to the news of their child's separation;
5. The parent's social support and various coping strategies reported in dealing with their reactions, specifically asking about persons in their social network who they have found to be supportive, and helpful coping activities such as praying or gardening;
6. The parents' present perception of relations with their child

and child-in-law as a potential subgroup of their social network, and as a potential source of stress; and

7. The parents' reports of physical and psychological adjustment, specifically changes in depressive and physical symptoms, and life satisfaction since the separation of their adult child.

Parental Background Variables

Parental background variables were included to examine how demographics and experiences are related to initial reactions and adjustment. There is some evidence to suggest that there are few differences that can be attributed to age or cohort when it comes to opinions about social trends, such as more egalitarian marriages (Nydegger, Mittness, & O'Neil, 1983). One question that arises from this finding is whether age of the parent is related to the type of reactions and degree of adjustment.

In regard to gender, research in family and intergenerational relations has suggested that women are the "family monitors", or "kinkeepers", based on reports of higher rates of kinship interaction between female kin (Bahr & Nye, 1974; Booth, 1972). Conflicts and problems in the family are more commonly recognized by women, and women are more likely to be affected by family problems than men (Chiriboga, 1979; Hagestad, Smyer, & Stierman, 1984). These findings most likely reflect long-term developmental sex-role socialization that influence females to be more empathic (e.g., Hoffman, 1979) and more sensitive to the needs and care of others (Gilligan, 1982) than males. In addition, there is some evidence that women may react more symptomatically to stressful life events in general, compared to men (Caldwell, Pearson, &

Chin, in press; Cooke & Hole, 1983; Klerman & Weissman, 1980). The questions that arise are whether mothers, compared to fathers, have stronger or more intense reactions to their child's separation, and whether gender differences in patterns of support, coping and adjustment (possibly based on different reactions) appear.

Religious orientation and acceptance by one's own religious group has been suggested to be an important factor in the decision to remain in a marital relationship (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). Divorce, like marriage, can be considered to be a religious or spiritual issue, as well as an emotional and legal one. Many churches provide a type of social support for separated and divorced people through sponsorship of supportive singles and parenting groups. An anecdotal report (Johnson & Vinick, 1982) suggests that the older parents' religious orientation and orthodoxy will affect both the type and intensity of their reaction, and the type of support or counselling that they will seek. In this report, a Catholic priest reported that an older parent parishoner wished to speak to him about her dismay over her child's divorce, which she believed violated the church's doctrine. Thus, inquiry as to how religious convictions have affected reactions to the marital separation of their child was included.

Parents' previous experience with divorce may also influence their reaction to their child's marital separation. There is modest support for the so-called "transmission of marital instability phenomenon" (e.g., Kulka & Weingarten, 1979; Pope & Mueller, 1976), where children from parental marriages disrupted by death or divorce during their childhood have higher rates of divorce or separation in their own first

marriages than do children from intact parental marriages. Some of the hypotheses proposed to account for the transmission of marital instability have included one or more of the following variables: parental personality (e.g., Dager, 1964); the economic situation of the divorced mother (e.g., Bane, 1976); lack of parental control over child behavior (e.g., Mueller & Pope, 1977); the communication of attitudes towards marriage and divorce from parent to child (e.g., Kulka & Weingarten, 1979); the adoption of maladaptive modeling (e.g., Mischel, 1970); and the experience of having a difficult childhood due to a conflict-ridden home where divorce is an outcome (e.g., Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Regardless of the mechanism involved in the transmission of marital instability, reactions to a child's divorce can be hypothesized to relate to a parent's previous experience with marital disruption. For example, a divorced parent may feel less embarrassed about their child's separation having accepted divorce as a possible solution to their own marital conflict. Parents who have not experienced a separation or divorce themselves, but have persons close to them who have (e.g., a sibling, another child, a close friend's child), may have less intense negative reactions as well, and/or find such people helpful in their coping with the event.

A parent's socioeconomic status, which includes income, education, and occupation, is hypothesized to influence reaction types, types of coping strategies and helpseeking behaviors, and degree of adjustment to their child's marital separation. Numerous epidemiological studies have found that lower classes are more likely to be exposed to more stress-inducing events than upper classes, and are more likely to exhibit mental and physical illnesses (e.g., Dohrenwend, 1973; Hollingshead &

Redlich, 1958; Myers, Lindenthal, & Pepper, 1974). Two questions pertinent to the study are whether lower socioeconomic status (SES) parents report more negative reactions which reflect an overall increased stress pattern, and whether low SES parents show poorer overall adjustment. In addition, Kessler (1979) has suggested that lower class persons are less likely to exhibit extreme responses to stressors even though their coping resources are considered limited. In present study, the range of reactions and adjustment of low SES respondents are examined to see if a similar "floor effect" exists for the specific stressor of a child's divorce.

Prior Parent- Child and Child-in-Law Relations

Prior parent- child and parent- child-in-law relations were expected to have an influence on parental reactions and adjustment. A parent who considers their prior relationship with their child as distant may not have as strong a reaction or as difficult an adjustment as a parent who describes their prior relationship with their child as very close. A similar pattern might occur between parents and their children-in-law. The parent who has experienced a close and warm relationship with their child-in-law may fear that they may never see him or her again. On the other hand, if the parent has had a troubled relationship with the child-in-law, the parent may feel relief in reaction to the separation.

Child's Situation

The separated adult child's situation was also expected to affect the type and intensity of parental reaction. Inclusion of parents'

perceptions of their child's financial needs, and the number and age of grandchildren is based on important findings from Johnson's (1983) study. Johnson found that many grandmothers feared that both child care and financial burdens would be placed upon them as the result of their child's (usually daughter's) separation. Because mothers are traditionally custodial parents of their children after divorce, and that women suffer more than men financially (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984), a daughter with custody of younger children may be perceived as a greater financial burden to the older parent, compared to a noncustodial son with a sufficient income.

A related issue to age of the grandchildren is the adult child's age. The older parent may be more concerned over the separation of a middle-aged-child who is less likely to remarry than a child in their 20's or 30's (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983). On the the other hand, the middle-aged adult child may be less likely to have financial problems or have a need for child care than a younger adult child.

An additional adult status variable considered in the present study is whether the adult child initiated the separation or not. Hagestad and Smyer (1981) have reported that a separation or divorce is less stressful for the person who initiated it. Hagestad and Smyer (1981) suggest that the initiator is likely to have begun to adapt to the change of not being a spouse, and may have told her or his parents in advance as well. However, the degree to which initiator status affects adjustment for the person separating may be confounded by gender (Bloom & Caldwell, 1981; Pettit & Bloom, 1984) as is custody attainment and financial status. Indeed, Petit and Bloom (1984) found that effect of

initiator status on postseparation adjustment was more pronounced for women than for men. Furthermore, in their review of four studies examining gender differences in pre- and post-separating men and women, Bloom and Caldwell (1981) found that prior to separation, women reported more severe psychological symptoms than did men. During the early post-separation period, however, men reported significantly more severe symptoms than did women. Thus, the adult child status variables may have interactive and/or cumulative effects on the older parents' perception of their child's situation.

Parents' Initial Reactions

The fourth area examined is the range of types of parents' initial reactions to the news that their adult child had maritally separated. Nineteen potential reactions are listed in Figure 1. Some of these were compiled from previous studies (Johnson & Vinick, 1982; Matthews & Sprey, 1984), and others were added based on several pilot questionnaires. Johnson and Vinick (1982) have reported mothers' reactions to their child's divorce to include fear, sadness, loss, shame, guilt, and good. Matthews and Sprey (1984) asked parents to choose one out of the following six reactions: anger, disappointment, frustration, indifference, sadness, or relief. Parents in the present study were asked to describe their reactions in their own words, and to respond to a list of reactions. These reactions were of interest in terms of their occurrence in potential clusters, and in relation to parents' demographics (e.g., gender), prior experience with divorce, child status variables, prior experience with the child, and adjustment outcomes.

Social Support and Other Ways of Coping

The fifth area examined was social support and other ways of coping reported by the parents to deal with their reactions. In regard to social support, source of support, support persons' experience with marital disruptions, frequency of and satisfaction with emotional and appraisal support specific to separation were of interest. Although large-scale surveys have documented the strength and benefits of the family as a support system to older adults (Shanas, 1979a; 1979b), the negative aspects of social support have also been noted (Antonucci, 1985). Indeed, Alford (1982) found both higher levels of intimacy and conflict within kin relationships compared to nonkin relationships. Thus, questions arose as to what proportions of family members and nonrelatives the parents would nominate, whether clergy or other helping professionals would be nominated, whether level of satisfaction might be related to types of support, whether there had been changes in frequency in contact with support persons, and how various types of support would be related to stress and adjustment.

In regard to coping strategies, parents' reports of coping were of interest in terms of how they would describe strategies in their own words, and how they would respond to descriptions of various ways of coping, based on the work by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Lazarus and Folkman have proposed a complex theory of coping that involves three general types of processes; information seeking, seeking emotional support, and avoidance. Unfortunately, there is little empirical evidence suggesting that specific types of coping exist and are regularly used. Further, there is little consensus in regard to whether

ways of coping vary with the timing of certain stressful events in relation to the life cycle. Gutmann (1974) has suggested that as men age they move from active mastery, to more passive modes, to regressive, magical modes. In contrast, Vaillant (1977) and Pfeiffer (1977) suggest that coping becomes more effective and realistic with age for both men and women, with more reliance on altruism, humor, and suppression. The present study provides an opportunity to explore such issues by examining reactions and ways coping to a specified event (i.e., a child's marital separation), across middle aged and older adults.

As noted in previous sections, the relationships among support and ways of coping with various parental background variables, child status, prior child relations, and type and intensity of reactions were also of interest. Support and coping were also examined for their potential effects on stress and adjustment.

Present Parent- Child and Child-in-Law Relations

Present quality of parent- child and child-in-law relations have been examined as a specific aspect of social support for parents that may help or hinder adjustment. Cohen and Wills (1985), in a recent review of the effects of social support, concluded that the direct beneficial effects of support seemed to be a function of the structure (i.e., family, friends, professionals) of the support network, while less direct, buffering effects were related to the functional (i.e., perceived supportiveness) aspects of the support network. Indeed, pilot data indicated that frequent contact with a child-in-law was helpful for some parents, but such contact was very distressful for others. From this example, it appears that a test of the effects of social support

should consider the support (or lack of support) provided by specific types of supportive persons (i.e., child and child-in-law) and the quality of the relationship.

Present relations with a child-in-law or child may also depend on the presence of minor children and custody arrangements. Johnson (1983) reported that some paternal grandmothers formed coalitions with their separated daughters-in-law in order to strengthen their relationships with their grandchildren. Thus, it may be the case that some parents attempt to maintain contact with the child-in-law in order to maintain relationships with grandchildren, but may not see the relationship as close, or supportive.

Parent Adjustment

Finally, the parents' recall of their psychological and physical adjustment in the six months prior to their adult child's marital separation, and report of their current adjustment was investigated. Pre-separation and current adjustment measures were included in order to assess the impact of this event on both psychological and physical health, as well as how support and coping may mediate the effect of the stress on adjustment. Although the negative effect of stress on physical health is widely assumed, it is not unequivocally supported (Plaut & Friedman, 1981). However, there is much evidence to suggest that stressful events can negatively affect psychological well-being (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978; Gore, 1978). In regard to social support, authors of two comprehensive reviews have concluded that social support influences both physical adjustment (Broadhead, Kaplan, James, Wagner, Schoenbach, Grimson, Heyden, Tibblin, & Gehlbach, 1983), and psychological health (Leavy, 1983). Three measures of adjustment--

depression, life satisfaction, and physical symptoms-- are included because of reports suggesting differences in types of adjustment based on perceptions of events (Caldwell, Pearson, & Chin, in press; Zautra & Reich, 1983). For example, Zautra and Reich (1983) concluded that "positive" life events have different effects than "negative" events on adjustment. They found that persons who experienced negative events suffered no detriment in quality of life ratings, but did appear more psychologically distressed; persons who experienced positive events did not report changes in psychological distress.

Changes in adjustment through change scores (controlling for recall scores) were examined in relation to parents' prior experiences and background, child status, discrepancies between prior and present parent-child and parent-child-in-law relations, type and range of reactions, and types of help-seeking and coping strategies.

Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to examine seven different areas hypothesized to be important in influencing the reaction and adjustment of an older parent to their adult child's marital separation. Many possible relations among the seven areas were noted. These relations are represented in Figure 2. Because many of the seven areas included variables that differed qualitatively in ways that did not easily lend themselves to forms of data reduction, an overall path model was not tested. However, numerous links in the model were examined through both descriptive and inferential statistics. The specific questions that were investigated included the following:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of this sample of parents whose adult child is maritally separated? How representative is this sample in terms of demographic characteristics? Is there a disproportionately high rate of separation or divorce among these parents?

2. What are the initial reactions reported by these parents? Do the reactions fall into clusters across the total sample of parents? Do reactions differ by parental age, gender, SES, or prior experience with marital disruption, the adult child's situation, or previous closeness in relationships with their child and child-in-law?

3. What coping strategies have these parents used? What type of clusters exist among the coping strategies? Who are the people the parents have found supportive in dealing with this event? Are the parents satisfied with the people they have talked to? Do coping strategies differ by parental demographics, parents' prior experience marital disruption, the adult child's situation, prior or present relationship with child and child-in-law, or initial reaction type and intensity? Do coping strategies or specific aspects of social support affect adjustment beyond initial reactions?

4. How have these parents reported their adjustment to their child's separation? Does distress and life satisfaction vary by parental demographics? By reactions? By discrepancies in prior and present child- and child-in-law-parent relations? Based on symptomatology patterns (i.e., depressive symptoms, life satisfaction, physical symptoms), can certain variables such as demographics or reaction types be identified as risk factors for these parents? Are there variables that can be identified as predictors of relatively

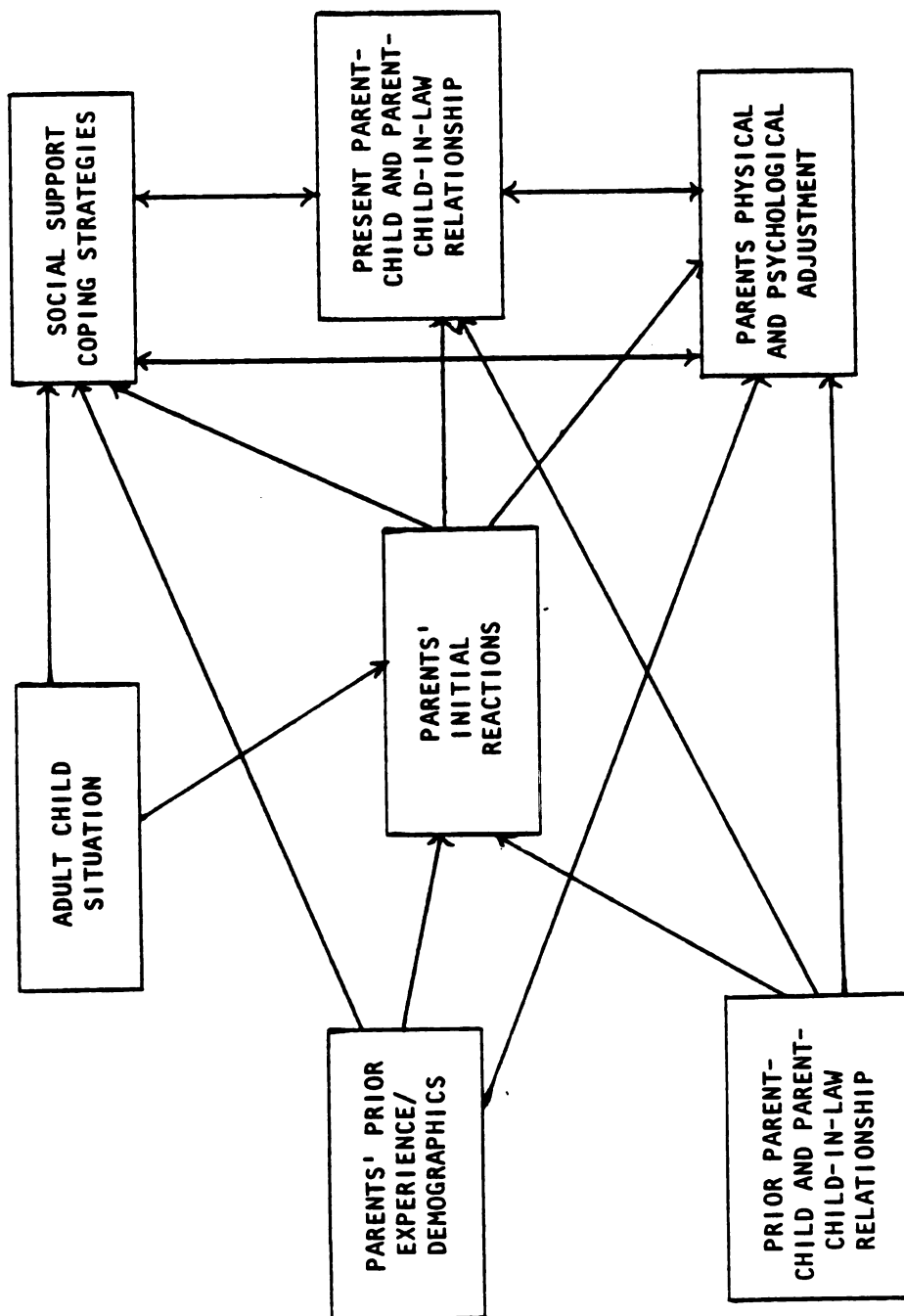


Figure 2: Potential Relationships Among Variables

"good" adjustment for these parents? Can certain coping strategies be identified as more helpful than others in terms of adjustment outcome?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Sample

A sample of 43 older parents, regardless of grandparent status, with an adult child who maritally separated in the last three years, responded to the questionnaire. The sample was obtained through a larger study on the effects of marital separation on the family. Separating adults in the larger study were asked for the name(s) and address(es) of their parents and parents-in-law. A letter of explanation inviting the older parents' participation was sent to them. Included with the letter was a postage-paid postcard that could be returned, indicating the older parents' interest in participating (see letter and postcard in Appendix A). To all persons appropriate and interested in participating in the study, the questionnaire described below was sent, along with a self-addressed, postage-paid return envelope. If the parents who requested a questionnaire did not return it within two weeks, a reminder letter was sent to them.

Measures

A 14 page questionnaire, designed to elicit the information listed in Figure 1 (above) was developed by the investigator. Most of the questions are in a pre-coded format recommended by Dillman (1978). However, several open ended questions were included to parallel some of the pre-coded questions. Below, all questions are described as they pertain to the variables of interest. The actual item order and the format of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

Parents' Demographics and Prior Experience with Marital Discord

The final nine questions in the survey elicited the parent status variables of gender, age, education, race, income, occupation or retirement, religion, and whether they care for their own parent or inlaw, in pre-coded formats. Questions 18 through 21 asked in a pre-coded format the parent's prior experience with separation or divorce, including whether the parent him- or herself had been separated, and whether a relative, friend, or other important person had experienced a separation.

Parents' Relations with Child and Child-in-law Prior to Separation

Question 6 asked in a pre-coded format about the quality of the parent- child and child-in-law relationships prior to separation, with five responses ranging from "very close and warm" to "hostile".

Parents' Perceptions of Child's Situation

The first five pre-coded questions were written to elicit the adult child status variables of age and gender, presence of and ages of children, and whether this was their child's first separation. Question 10 asked whether or not the adult child's separation is a financial burden, and asked for explanation of this possible burden. Question 11 asked in pre-coded format if the parents anticipate a financial burden due to their child's situation in the future. Question 14 asked in a pre-coded format the parents' perception regarding the initiator status of their child's separation.

Parents' Reactions

Question 12 asked in a precoded format when the parent first heard about their child's separation. Question 13 asked in a open format how they heard about it. Question 15 asked the parent to explain in their

own words their first reaction to their child's separation. Question 16 asked in a pre-coded format to what degree the parent suspected that there were marital problems. Question 17 was a list of 19 reactions in Likert format that asked the parent whether the reaction was 1--"not at all my reaction" to 5--"very much my reaction". This list was compiled from previous research (Johnson & Vinick, 1982; Matthews & Sprey, 1984) and pilot data. Question 22 asked if the parent's religious convictions have made it difficult for them to accept/adapt to their child's separation, and asked for a brief explanation.

Parents' Ways of Coping

Question 23 asked the parent to describe in their own words how they have coped with their reactions. Question 24 was a list of 48 coping behaviors derived from Lazarus and Folkman (1984), and Chiriboga, Jenkins, and Baily (1983). The coping list asked how often the parent has felt or behaved for each item in regard to their coping with their child's separation within the following categories: never, some, or a lot.

Parents' Social Support

Questions 26 through 31 pertained to important persons who had provided support for the older parents, and was fashioned after a social support questionnaire developed by Norbeck (1982). First, parents were asked to list up to 10 people who provided personal support for them in regard to their child's separation. Then parents were queried about these nominees in regard to 1) their relationship to the parent (e.g., spouse, minister); 2) their previous experience with separation or divorce; 3) the changes in the frequency of contact with the nominees

since the separation; 4) the degree to which they had been consulted; and 5) the degree of satisfaction the parents had felt in talking with the nominees. As a specific support subgroup, parents were also asked about their present and anticipated relations with their child and child-in-law. Questions 7 and 8 asked about the quality of the of present relationships with child and child-in-law. Question 25 asked in a pre-coded format whether contact with the adult child and/or child-in-law would make it more difficult or easy for the parent to cope.

Adjustment Measures

After the social support questions, the adjustment measures of depression, physical symptoms, and life satisfaction were included. All of these adjustment measures have been used in previous community-survey studies. All were modified so as to obtain perceptions of psychological and physical symptoms in the six months previous to the news of the separation, and since the news of the separation. Question 32 was the 20 item Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). The CES-D has been found to be reliable and valid across a wide variety of demographic characteristics in the general population (Radloff, 1977). Question 33 was the 25 item Composite Symptom Checklist (CSC; Bloom & Caldwell, 1981). The CSC was originally developed for use in a marital disruption study, and has been shown to be reliable and sensitive to gender differences in adjustment to marital separation, as well as to changes in adjustment over time (Bloom & Caldwell, 1981). Question 34 was a compilation of items used by Andrews and Withey (1976) in their nation-wide survey of Americans' life satisfaction. Eighteen items were selected to reflect life satisfaction in regard to self, home, job, health, psychological well-being, income,

adaptability, responsibility, relations with family and friends, and an overall estimation of how things were going. The respondent was asked to rate these areas on a seven point scale from "delighted" to "terrible", and hence the name, the Delighted-Terrible Scale (DTS; Andrews & Withey, 1976).

The last page of the survey included two forms; one for requesting results and/or a referral for counselling, and a form for nominating another parent who may be appropriate for the study. None of the parents requested counselling referrals, and three parents nominated other parents who qualified for the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of both descriptive and inferential analyses are reported. Descriptive information on both parents and their separated children are first described, followed by a report of the relationships among the remaining measured variables as described by each heading. In the last section of this chapter, the effects of reactiveness, coping, and social support on present adjustment are also described.

Number of Separated Children

A total of 36 maritally separated children were reported on by this sample of older parents. This number is less than the number of parents, due to the fact that seven of the parents had spouses responding to the questionnaire.

Response Rate

Forty-three older parents responded to the questionnaire out of a total identified sample of 68 parents, resulting in a 63% return rate. Of the remaining 25 (37%) who did not return a questionnaire, seven gave no response to the letter of invitation, three returned a postcard indicating that they did not want to participate, and 15 did not return questionnaires that they had requested even after a reminder letter had been sent to them.

Parent Demographics

The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Fourteen (33%) men and 29 (67%) women responded to the questionnaire. Their ages ranged from 40 to 79, with an average of 62

Table 1

Parent Demographic Characteristics

<u>Gender</u>			<u>Education</u>		
	<u>N</u>	<u>Percentage</u>		<u>N</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Male	14	33%	Completed grade school	1	2%
Female	29	67%	Some high school	1	2%
<u>Marital Status</u>			Completed high school	14	33%
Married	36	84%	Some college	15	35%
Separated	1	2%	Completed college	6	14%
Divorced	2	5%	Some graduate work	4	9%
Widowed	4	9%	A graduate degree	2	5%
<u>Age (in years)</u>			<u>Income</u>		
40 - 50	3	7%	Under \$4,999	2	5%
51 - 60	18	42%	5,000 - 9,999	5	12%
61 - 70	17	39%	10,000 - 14,999	4	9%
71 - 79	5	12%	15,000 - 19,999	6	14%
<u>Religion</u>			20,000 - 24,999	4	9%
Protestant	29	67%	25,000 - 29,999	4	9%
Catholic	6	14%	30,000 - 34,999	4	9%
Jewish	2	5%	35,000 - 39,999	3	7%
Other	3	7%	40,000 and over	11	26%

years. In regard to current marital status, 84% were married, 9% were widowed, 5% were divorced, and 2% were separated. However, 23% reported that they had been separated or divorced; one parent in the last year, three parents within six to ten years ago, and four parents more than eleven years ago. All respondents reported that they were Caucasian with the exception of one Black male. Education levels ranged from having completed high school, to obtaining a graduate degree, with some college as the average and modal education level. Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents listed themselves as Protestant, 14% as Catholic, and 5% as Jewish. Annual income levels ranged from under \$5,000 to over \$40,000, with an average of \$22,000. Twenty-six per cent of the sample had incomes in the \$40,000+ bracket.

Representativeness of the Sample

Estimating from 1980 Census figures, this sample differs from the larger population by having a greater income, higher levels of education, an under-representation of minority races, and an over-representation of women (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983; 1984). In regard to parents' rate of separation and divorce, it is difficult to say whether it differs significantly from the larger population. According to 1980 Census figures, the sample has fewer persons reporting separation or divorce than would be expected. Further, if estimations that 40% of all marriages end in divorce are accurate, this sample has had fewer experiences with their own marital separation and divorce than national samples.

Relations Among Parents' Demographics

Although no specific hypotheses were made in regard to relations

among the parents' demographics, these relations were potentially important for interpretations of relations among demographics and other variables. Men were significantly older, $r = -.33$, $p < .01$. Cohort may have had an effect on level of educational attainment, with older respondents reporting significantly less education, $r = -.37$, $p < .01$. Older respondents were also more likely to have experienced a marital separation themselves, $r = .27$, $p < .04$. As expected, income and education were significantly related, $r = .35$, $p < .01$. Not expected was a significant positive relation between income and having experienced a marital separation, $r = .51$, $p < .001$.

Parents' Prior Experience with Marital Separation

Parents' prior experience with marital separation was of interest in terms of how it might relate to parents' perceptions of relations with their child, reactions, coping, and eventual adjustment to their child's separation. Besides parents' experience with their own marital separation (noted above), 26% reported that they had another child who had separated, 19% said that their own parents had separated, 40% had a sibling who had separated, 48% had a friend who had separated, and 74% had a friend whose child had experienced a marital separation. Excluding the parents' own separation, these five types of experience with marital separation were summed, and considered a "separation-experience" scale. Parent's own separation was excluded from the separation experience scale because inspection of correlations revealed differences in correlational patterns between parents' own separation, and knowledge of other's separation. Twenty-six per cent of the parents had one separation experience, 21% experienced two, 26% experienced

three, 12% experienced four, and one parent had experienced all five. Thus, 86% of the sample had at least one an acquaintance or relative who had experienced a marital disruption.

One area that separation experience affected was the parents' awareness of their child's marital problems; the more experience the parents had had with marital separation, the greater the likelihood that their child had discussed their problems with their parents, $r = .41$, $p < .01$. Separation experience was not significantly related to Reactiveness, ways of coping, or social support (discussed below).

Parents' Perceptions of Child's Situation

It is important to note that seven of the parents had a spouse who also responded to the questionnaire, and thus seven adult children's characteristics are duplicated in the following results. Informal inspection of these parent pairs suggested that beyond the demographic information on their child, responses in terms of reactions, coping, and adjustment appeared surprisingly dissimilar among parent pairs. Thus, statistical tests of concordance among the parent pairs were not conducted.

The average age of the children for which this group of older adults reported was 35, with a range of 22 to 49 years. Twenty-four (56%) of the older adults had sons who had separated, and 19 (44%) had daughters. Separated daughters tended to be somewhat older than sons, $r = .25$, $p < .05$. The average length of separation was one year, with a range of one to 90 months. For 30% of the children, this was at least their second marital separation. Twenty-four (56%) of the adult children also had children under the age of 16. According to the older

parents' reports, 35% of the adult children had initiated the separation, 40% said that their child-in-law initiated, and the remaining 25% said it was a mutual decision between their child and child-in-law. In regard to their children's financial status, 14% reported that their child's separation was a financial burden for them, and an additional 14% reported that it may become a burden in the future.

Financial burden was significantly and positively related to parent age, $r = .31$, $p < .03$, as was child age, $r = .29$, $p < .05$. Daughters were more likely to be reported as being financial burdens than sons, $r = .38$, $p < .01$, even though there was no relationship between presence of grandchildren and sex of adult child. This could suggest several scenarios for separated daughters: It may be that many of the daughters were not employed post-separation; that they had additional financial responsibilities compared to sons; they were less prepared occupationally; that they receive lesser pay in general, as does the population of women in general.

Parents' Prior Relations with Child and Child-in-law

Parents' prior relations with their child and child-in-law were explored in terms of their correlation with child status, and parent reactions, coping, and adjustment. Sixty-three per cent of the parents described their relationship with their child in the year prior to the separation as "very close and warm"; 30% described it as "somewhat close"; 7% as "indifferent"; and 2% as "distant and cool". In regard to the parents' prior relationship with their child-in-law, 21% described it as very close and warm; 63% as somewhat close; 7% as indifferent; 7%

as distant and cool, and 2% as hostile.

The intensity of the parents' pre-separation relations with both child and child-in-law were significantly related to parent age. Younger parents were more likely to report more negative relations with their child-in-law, $r = .35$, $p < .01$, and more positive relations with their child, $r = -.27$, $p < .05$. Negative pre-separation relations with both child and child-in-law were also correlated with child age, $r = .30$, $p < .05$. Positive or warm parent pre-separation relations with both their child and child-in-law were also related to the separation being their child's first, both $r = .30$, $p < .05$. A positive relationship with the child was also related to the presence of grandchildren, $r = .30$, $p < .05$.

How Parents Heard about the Separation

How parents heard about their child's separation was thought to be important in terms of perceived parent- child and child-in-law relations, and how the parents reacted. Most of the parents (78%) reported that they had heard about their child's separation from their child in person, through a letter, or via phone conversation. Seventeen per cent, however, heard the news from their child-in-law. One parent (2%) heard it from both child and child-in-law together, and another parent (2%) heard from the adult child's sibling. Thirty-five per cent of the parents said that their child had talked openly to them about the possibility of separating, 19% of the parents said they strongly suspected that their child would separate, 16% had wondered about it, and 30% had no idea their child was considering a marital separation. Children were more likely to discuss the possibility of separating with

their parent when the separation was not their first, $r = .33$, $p < .01$.

Parents' Reactions

As noted above, parents' reactions were asked in both an open-ended format, and by a list of reactions in a Likert-type format, in order to explore both the range and intensity of reactions. Table 2 lists the initial reactions given by the parents in response to the request, "please describe your first reaction to your child's marital separation". Although 65% of the parents did not report more than one reaction, a diversity of reactions were reported. Reactions reported that were not queried in the Likert-format reaction items included opinions about their child's unwillingness to "work things out", concern for grandchildren, and pain and hurt.

Responses to the 19 Likert-type reaction items were submitted to a cluster analyses in order to explore possible factor structures of reactions experienced by the parents. Since there was no empirical basis for assuming that there were reliable and distinct types of reactions, the 19 reactions were initially examined all together as a single cluster, resulting in a coefficient alpha of .73. Although this alpha is suggestive of a general concept, it was difficult to find similarities across some reactions, such as "relief" and "burden". Therefore, further cluster analyses were undertaken, guided by a priori groupings of what appeared to be three types of reactions. This second analysis resulted in three clusters with coefficient alphas ranging from .70 to .85 that appeared to tap reactions of loss, responsibility, and relief. The intercorrelations of the clusters were as follows: loss and responsibility, $r = .51$, loss and relief, $r = .$

Table 2. Initial Reactions Reported by Parents

Reaction	Number of Reports	Reaction	Number of Reports
Surprise	16 (37%)	Indifference	1
Sadness	9 (21%)	Not again	1
Upset	4 (9%)	Concern	1
Concern for welfare of grandchildren	4 (9%)	Worried about child's security	1
Pain/Hurt	2 (5%)	Loss	1
Relief	2	Expected it	1
Acceptance	2	Devasted	1
Sympathy for Child	2	Thought it was hasty	1
Disbelief	2	About time	1
Thought it could be worked out	2	Didn't take it seriously	1
Happy	1	Didn't approve	1
Anger	1	Disappointment	1

Note: Percentages indicate the proportion of parents from the total sample (N = 43) who reported the reaction. Due to multiple responses, percent total exceeds 100.

.73, and relief and responsibility, $r = -.30$. Only one of the reaction items, "indifference", did not correlate with the clusters, and was omitted from the second cluster analysis. Indeed, 88% of the sample indicated that indifference was "not at all my reaction", which highlights the significance of the child's marital separation in the parents' lives.

Although relief and responsibility appeared to be potentially distinct types of reactions, loss and relief were highly negatively related. Thus, another cluster analysis on all items was conducted, reversing the relief items (joy, relief), and omitting reactions not statistically contributing to the single cluster. The resulting cluster contains all reaction items with the exception of the indifference and bitterness items. Table 3 shows the resulting item-total correlations, and the standardized alpha for the final, one cluster scale. For the remaining analyses, this factor was considered a measure of "reactiveness", or intensity of reactions. The mean for the Reactiveness scale was 3.18 (based on scale of anchors of 1 to 5), with scores ranging from 1.53 to 5.00.

Reactiveness did not differ across any of the parent demographics (i.e., age, gender, education, income), nor did it correlate with parents' own separation experience or knowing others who had experienced a separation. As expected, parents who reported that their own religious convictions made it difficult for them to accept or adapt to their child's separation were likely to report higher levels of Reactiveness, $r = .46$, $p < .001$. Presence of grandchildren was related to higher levels of reactions as expected, $r = .35$, $p < .01$.

Table 3. Reactiveness scale items, mean response*, item-total correlations corrected for attenuation, and coefficient alphas (N = 40)

Item	Mean	Item-total	Coefficient Alpha
1. Loss	3.4	.65	
2. Sadness	4.3	.59	
3. Surprise	3.2	.43	
4. Disappointment	3.9	.76	
5. Dismay	3.3	.71	
6. Concern	4.6	.59	
7. Powerlessness	3.7	.48	
8. Upset	4.3	.70	
9. Anger	2.1	.22	
10. Guilt	1.5	.36	
11. Embarrassment	1.7	.36	
12. Feeling Responsible	1.3	.33	
13. Burden	1.8	.54	
14. Fear	2.1	.43	
15. Had Mixed Feelings	3.4	.42	
16. Relief (reversed)	1.6	.55	
17. Joy (reversed)	1.5	.48	.85

* Scale anchors were "1 - not at all my reaction", and "5 - very much my reaction".

Reactiveness was related to parents' knowledge of their child's marital problems, with reaction intensity decreasing with more knowledge, $r = -.27$, $p < .05$. Parents' prior positive relations with their child-in-law were highly related to reaction intensity as expected, $r = -.46$, $p < .001$. However, there was no significant relation between parents' relations with their child prior to separation and parents' reactiveness, as expected. Relations among Reactiveness and coping, social support, and adjustment are discussed below.

Parents' Ways of Coping

Similar to the inquiry about reactions to the separation, the ways in which the parents coped were asked in both open-ended and pre-coded formats in order to explore the range and frequency of coping behaviors. Coping behaviors were also of interest in terms of their relation to child status variables, parent status variables, parent - child relations, reactiveness, and adjustment. Responses to the question, "Please describe any events or experiences that seem to help, or hinder, your coping with your child's separation", are listed in Table 4. Twelve parents listed one way of coping, 21 listed two ways, and six listed three ways they had coped. The most frequently reported ways of coping included prayer (26%), talking with their child (21%), and attempting to maintain a relationship with their child-in-law (12%).

In order to explore the possible types of coping behaviors used by the parents, the responses to the 45 precoded coping items were submitted to a cluster analysis. Again, all items were submitted as if they were one cluster, since there was little existing empirical evidence to suggest otherwise. The coefficient alpha for this cluster

Table 4. Ways of Coping Reported by Parents

Way of Coping	Number of Reports	Way of Coping	Number of Reports
Prayer	11 (26%)	Acceptance	1
Talked with Child	9 (21%)	Offer suggestions	1
Maintain relationship with child-in-law	5 (12%)	Tried to understand there was no hope	1
Offered support	4 (9%)	Gardening	1
Financial help	4	Realize it's for the best	1
Increase positive contact with child	4	Rely on past experience to draw on	1
Provide a place for child to stay	3 (7%)	Arrange for future visitation with grandchildren	1
Denied it/Ignored it	3	Feed child and grandchildren	1
Empathy	2 (5%)	Talk with my other children	1
Hope	2	Talk with friends	1
Babysit grandchildren	2	Talk with spouse	1
Listen to child	2	Try to understand both sides	1
Support child psychologically	2	Accept own emotions	1
Keep feelings to self	1	Cry	1
Self-blame	1		
Worry	1		

Note: Percentages indicate the proportion of parents from the total sample (N = 43) who reported the type of coping. Due to multiple responses, percent total exceeds 100.

was .73. Given the difficulty in conceptualizing what these diverse items represented, further cluster analyses were conducted based on two, a priori groupings. The two clusters that resulted were named Avoidance Coping and Active Coping, with coefficient alphas of .84 and .85, respectively. Table 5 shows these items, their mean responses, item-total correlations, and alphas. Fifteen items were excluded from the two clusters for lack of either statistical relationship, or conceptual relationship. The intercorrelation between the two clusters was $-.25$. The mean response to the Avoidance Coping scale was .67 (scale anchors ranged from 0 to 2), with scores ranging from .08 to 1.67. The mean response to the Active Coping scale was 1.13, with scores ranging from .19 to 2.0.

In regard to relations among coping scales and parent demographics, mothers were more likely to report the behaviors described in the Active Coping scale, $r = .38$, $p < .01$. None of the remaining demographics (age, education, income) were significantly related to the coping scales, nor were the child status variables, nor parents' prior with separation. Active Coping was related to parents' knowledge, with more knowledge related to more reports of active coping behaviors, $r = .27$, $p < .05$. Avoidance Coping was related to Reactiveness, $r = .36$, $p < .01$, suggesting that either parents with strong reactions are likely to use Avoidance behaviors to deal with them, or, parents with Avoidance coping strategies cannot temper their reactions. Relations among coping scales, social support, and adjustment are discussed below.

Table 5. Coping scale items, mean response*, item-total correlations corrected for attenuation, and coefficient alphas (N = 38)

Active Coping	Mean	Item-total	Coefficient Alpha
1. Tried to learn from the situation	1.84	.67	
2. Changed or grew as a person in a good way	.89	.77	
3. Changed myself so I could deal with it better	.78	.50	
4. Found new faith or some important truth in life	.87	.63	
5. Prayed about it	1.46	.50	
6. Re-examined my goals regarding my child	.95	.60	
7. Tried to find out more about the situation	1.30	.41	
8. Discussed the situation with someone	1.26	.42	
9. Sought emotional support from my friends and family	1.16	.39	
10. Rediscovered what is important in life	1.00	.53	
12. Counted my blessings	1.53	.53	
13. Let my feelings out somehow	1.05	.49	
14. Anticipated difficulty and tried to prepare myself emotionally	.97	.27	
15. Asked someone I respected for advice and followed it	.49	.47	
16. Talked to my child about my feelings	1.03	.48	
17. Just took one step at a time	1.61	.36	.85

Table 5 continues.....

Table 5. cont.

<u>Avoidance Coping</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Item-total</u>	<u>Coefficient Alpha</u>
1. Imagined a better place and time than the one I was in	.51	.58	
2. Took it out on other people, somehow	.26	.57	
3. Kept others from knowing how I was feeling	.90	.48	
4. Didn't let it get to me; I refused to think about it	.72	.44	
5. Took a big chance or did something risky	.16	.66	
6. Wished I could change the way I felt	.85	.69	
7. Felt bad that I couldn't change the situation	1.10	.63	
8. Wished the situation could go away or be over with	1.15	.51	
9. Hoped a miracle would happen	.95	.46	
10. Felt better by drinking, eating or smoking	.31	.61	
11. Slept more than usual	.22	.64	
12. Had a fantasy about how things might turn out	.49	.54	.84

Parents' Social Support

Parents' social support was queried in order to explore its relations to parents' reactions, other types of coping, and adjustment to the separation. Specific aspects of parents' social support that were also of interest included their relations with their supports (e.g., family, persons in the helping professions), and the amount of experience with marital separation their supports had had. Parents were asked to list up to 10 people who had provided them with personal support regarding their child's marital separation. The average number of support people listed was five, with a standard deviation of three. Three parents (7%) indicated that no one had provided them support, and six parents (14%) reported that ten people had been supportive. In regard to the the type of people who provided them support, those listing family members (including extended family) ranged from 0 to 9. In terms of percentages, this range was 0 to 100%, with an average proportion of family members listed being 55%. The average proportion of friends listed as supportive was 30%. One parent listed two neighbors as part of their separation support network, and two parents listed one neighbor. Similarly, one parent listed one co-worker as supports, and two parents listed two co-workers. Ten parents (23%) listed one member of the clergy as supports, and three parents listed two clergy as supports. Of the four parents who stated that their religious convictions made it difficult to accept or adapt to the event, two (half) listed a member of the clergy in their support networks. Only two parents listed a physician as a support, and none of the parents indicated that a counselor was a part of their support network.

In regard to the parents' support network's experience with marital

discord, an average of 28% of the network had experienced it themselves, and an average of 33% had a child who had separated or divorced. In terms of possible changes in frequency of contact with support network members, responses ranged from "1 - significant decrease", to "5 - significant increase". The mean of the parents' network contact frequency was 3.03, with about 70% of the parents having reported no changes in contact since their child's separation. In response to the question, "to what extent have you talked with each person about your child's separation?", answers ranged from "1 - a little", to "5 - a great deal", with the average response being 3.67. Support satisfaction scores also ranged from 1 to 5, with "1 - not at all satisfied", to "5 - very satisfied". Overall, the parents were satisfied with the support they had received in regard to their child's separation, with the mean support network score being 4.30 and standard deviation of .77.

Aspects of the parents' support network were compiled into eight scales based on network characteristics found to be important in the social support literature. These included Total number of Support persons listed, and percentages of Family, Friends, Separated persons (Sep-network), and Persons with Separated Children (Sep-Child-network). Scales based on mean scores for changes in support contact (Sup-Freq), how much they had talked to the supportive person specifically about their child's separation (Sup-Talk), and satisfaction with Sup-Talk (Sup-Sat) were also computed.

Correlations among aspects of social support, parent status, reactivity, and coping are presented in Table 6. In regard to relations among social support variables and parent demographics,

parents with more income were more likely to report more Total support. Younger and more educated parents were more likely to report a greater percentage of family members in their networks. Parents who perceived that their child's separation was or could be a financial burden were less likely to report a large proportion of family members in their support group, as were parents of daughters who had separated. If there was a financial burden perceived, parents were more likely to list friends, rather than family, in their network. Parents' positive, current contact with their separated child correlated with the parents listing a low percentage of friends in their support network, and a tendency to list more family members.

In regard to the percent of the parents' network members who had separated themselves (Sep-network), younger parents, and poorer parents, were more likely to list such network members. Sep-network members were likely to be friends. Parents who had a high percentage of Sep-network were likely to report a low degree of intensity of reactions.

Those parents who had a high percentage of network members whose child had separated (Sep-Child-network) were more likely to describe having religious convictions that made it difficult to accept or adapt to the separation. In contrast to the parents who listed a high percentage of Sep-network members, the parents with high Sep-Child-network members were more likely to describe more intense reactions. Parents with a high percentage of Sep-Child-network members were more likely to state that they had done more Active Coping.

In regard to changes in the frequency of contact with their support network, parents with more education, more income, and more intense reactions, reported an increase in frequency of contact with their

Table 6. Correlation Matrix of Selected Parent Status Variables, Child Status Variables, Parents' Reactiveness Coping, and Social Support (n's range from 28 to 40)

	Parent age	Parent educ.	Parent income	Parent relig. infl.	Child sex	Parent's financ. burden	Present contact w/child	Reac-tive listen-	Active coping	Avoid. coping	Total famill. supp.	Frie. supp.	Sep. Child supp.	Sep. Sup. freq.
Parent educ.	-.36 b													
Parent income	-.01	.38 b												
Parent relig. confl.	.02	-.06	-.07											
Child sex	.13	-.09	-.04	.13										
Perc'd financ. burden	.31 a	-.26	-.22	-.01	.38 b									
Present con w/ ch.	-.04	-.18	-.09	.09	-.33 a	-.07								
Reactive-ness	.08	.05	.13	-.28 a	-.10	-.02	-.11							
Active coping	-.09	.09	-.16	.17	.19	.07	-.06	.08						
Avoid. coping	.07	.08	-.24	-.04	-.16	-.03	-.08	.36 b	-.08					
Total sup.	.10	-.02	.28 a	-.06	.02	-.24	.01	.04	.22	-.22				
Fam. sup.	-.27 a	.26	.23	.20	-.29 a	-.37 b	.39	.23	-.03	-.24	.04			
Friend sup.	.21	-.16	-.42 b	-.13	.19	.48 b	-.45 b	-.14	-.09	.25	-.57 c	-.73 c		
Sep. sup.	-.38 b	.03	-.34 b	.05	-.08	-.05	-.16	-.27 a	.07	.10	-.10	.13	.41 b	
Sep. child sup.	-.13	.07	-.04	.28 a	-.10	-.19	-.16	.27 a	.45 b	.18	-.12	.01	-.04	.12
Sup freq.	-.22	.31 a	.36 b	-.02	-.16	-.34 a	.13	.32 a	.03	.06	.19	.23	.42 a	-.22 .35 b
Sup talk	.03	.06	.08	-.09	-.06	-.29 a	.12	.11	.21	-.25	.04	.36 b	.19	.01 .31 a .50 c

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support network. Those parents with a high percentage of friends in their support network were likely to report a decrease in contact with their network. Overall increases in network contact were also highly related to the parents' specifically discussing their child's separation (Sup-talk).

Parents' support satisfaction (Sup-Sat) was not related to any of the parent demographics, prior experience with marital separation, child status variables, Reactiveness, ways of coping, or the other aspects of social support measured. This is most likely due to a restriction in variability of responses, as 80% of the parents reported that they were very satisfied with the support they had received.

Parents' Present Relations with Child and Child-in-law

Parents' present relations with their child and child-in-law were considered important as a specific subset of family social support. Such relations were of interest in terms of changes in quality of relations since the separation, and in terms of how present relations were related to parent adjustment. Parents described their present relationship with their child as generally positive, with 70% stating that it was very close and warm, 23% as somewhat close, 5% as indifferent, and one parent reporting that it was hostile. It appears that there is a slight change from parents' reports of their relationships with their children prior to the separation, with parents becoming more extreme in their estimation of the quality of the relationships (i.e., either more positive or negative). In regard to parent's present relationships with their child-in-law, there are more dramatic changes. Forty-four per cent of the parents reported that

their present relationship with their child-in-law was currently distant and cool; 17% reporting that it was indifferent; 17% reporting it was somewhat close; 17% stated it was very close and warm, and 7% said it was hostile. In general, the parents' relationship with their child-in-law had become more distant or hostile since the separation, for prior relations $m = 2.07$, and for present relations, $m = 3.07$, $t(40) = 6.75$, $p < .001$.

Parents' Adjustment

Measures of adjustment were included to assess the impact of this event on the parents' physical and psychological health, and to examine how ways of coping and support may be effective in mediating stress based on adjustment. Thirty-nine parents completed the adjustment measures. Recall Depression (CES-D) scores for the period prior to hearing about their child's separation ranged from 0 to 35 out of a total possible of 60, with an average score of 11. Twenty-six percent of those parents completing the CES-D had scores of 16 or more, which is considered representative of possible clinical depression (Radloff, 1977). Current CES-D scores did not statistically differ from the pre-separation scores; again, there was a wide range of depressive symptoms reported, with scores ranging from 1 to 43, and the average being 16, indicating an increase in depressive symptoms. It is interesting to note that the same 26% of the parents who scored greater than or equal to 16 on the CES-D recall scale also scored 16 or more on the current CES-D.

Parents' Composite Symptom Checklist (CSC) recall scores for the period prior to hearing about their child's separation ranged from 2 to

51 out of a total possible score of 66, with an average of 13. Current CSC scores ranged from 2 to 52, with an average of 15, and did not significantly differ from CSC pre-separation scores.

Parents' Life Satisfaction, as measured by the Delighted-Terrible Scale (DTS), had a total possible score of 95 (answering all items as "delighted"). Parents' recall DTS scores prior to hearing about the separation ranged from 18 to 87, with a mean of 65, or an average response across items falling between "pleased" and "mixed" categories. Current DTS scores did not significantly differ from pre-separation scores, with a range of 38 to 90, and an average of 68.

Change scores for adjustment measures were calculated by subtracting reported adjustment scores prior to the child's separation from current adjustment scores, in order to examine changes in each of the adjustment measures. The change scores also allowed for examination of relations among adjustment variables and parent status and child status variables through simple correlations. The mean adjustment score for the CES-D was 4.44, with a range of -8 to +34. The mean change score for the CSC was 1.86, with a range of -5 to +30. Negative change scores indicate a decrease in symptomatology since the separation, and a positive score indicates an increase in symptomatology. The mean change score for the DTS was 2.6, with a range of -9 to +48, with negative change scores indicating decrease in satisfaction, and positive numbers indicating a increase in life satisfaction. All correlations of adjustment pre-existing adjustment) partialled out. In regard to the correlations among adjustment change scores with recall scores partialled out, only the CES-D and CSC were significantly related, $r = .64$, $p < .001$.

No significant age, education, or income level differences were found on the adjustment measures. Mothers, however, were more likely to report an increase in depressive (CES-D) symptomatology, $r = .26$, $p < .06$, and psychophysiological symptomatology (CSC), $r = .30$, $p < .05$. Parents with more intense reactions were more likely to report an increase in symptoms on the CES-D, $r = .39$, $p < .01$, and CSC, $r = .33$, $p < .05$.

Neither of the coping scales were significantly related to changes in the adjustment measures. However, the percentage of family members listed in support networks was negatively related to increases on the CES-D, $r = -.44$, $p < .01$, and the CSC, $r = -.35$, $p < .02$. Support satisfaction was also negatively related to increases on the CSC, $r = -.37$, $p < .02$. Increase in support frequency was positively related to increased life satisfaction (DTS), $r = .46$, $p < .01$.

The Effects of Coping and Social Support on Adjustment

To explore the potential cumulative effects of reactivity, coping, and social support on current adjustment as outcome, 36 hierarchical multiple regressions were computed. The effects of the following 12 coping and social support variables were examined in relation to each of the three adjustment measures: Total support, proportion of Family supports, proportion of Friend supports, proportion of supports who had separated themselves (Sep-network), proportion of supports who had children who had separated (Sep-Child-network), mean changes in support frequency (Sup-Freq), to what extent they had talked to each support (Sup-Talk), satisfaction with support (Sup-Sat), present quality of contact with child, present quality of contact with child-in-

law, Active coping, and Avoidance coping. All regression equations were in the following form: Prior adjustment score was entered first to control for adjustment assumed unrelated to the separation event, then Reactiveness was entered, followed by a coping or support variable, with each equation predicting one of the three current adjustment measures. Of the 36 multiple regressions conducted, four had significant predictors that were support or coping variables. The results of these four regressions are presented in Table 7. An additional eight equations resulted in Reactiveness being a significant predictor of current adjustment beyond prior adjustment, without a coping or social support variable predicting any additional significance variance.

As can be seen in Table 7, current depression (CES-D) was predicted by both Reactiveness, and absence of Family support. The directions of the correlations and beta weights suggest that greater intensity of reactions led to more depressive symptoms, while higher levels of family support lead to a decrease in symptoms. Reactiveness was not predictive of physical symptoms (CSC), but Support Satisfaction (Sup-Sat) was related to a reduction in symptoms. Similarly, Reactiveness was not predictive of life satisfaction (DTS), but Support Frequency and Avoidance coping were. Greater increase in support frequency was predictive of greater levels of life satisfaction. Increases in Avoidance coping appeared to be a detriment to life satisfaction ratings.

Table 7

Multiple Regressions of Pre-separation Adjustment, Reactiveness, and
Mediating Variables on Current Adjustment

Current CES-D (n = 35)

Variable	r	beta	² R change
Pre-CES-D	.69 ^c	.64 ^c	.48 ^c
Reactiveness	.32 ^a	.19	.06 ^a
Family Support	-.38 ^b	-.25 ^a	.06 ^a

Current CSC (n = 33)

Variable	r	beta	² R change
Pre-CSC	.93 ^c	.93 ^c	.87 ^c
Reactiveness	.07	.10	.01
Support Satis.	-.16	-.12 ^a	.02 ^a

Table 7 continues.....

Table 7, Continued

Current DTS (n = 33)

Variable	r	beta	² R change
Pre-DTS	.70 ^c	.78 ^c	.49 ^c
Reactiveness	-.15	-.04 ^a	.00 ^a
Support Frequency	.00	.27 ^a	.06 ^a

Current DTS (n = 37)

Variable	r	beta	² R change
Pre-DTS	.71 ^c	.63 ^c	.50 ^c
Reactiveness	-.17	.04	.00
Avoidance Coping	-.44 ^c	-.25 ^a	.05 ^a

^a
^b $p < .05$

^b $p < .01$

^c $p < .001$

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study examined how 43 older parents reacted, coped, and adjusted to the marital separation of their child. In addition, several areas hypothesized to influence reactions, coping, and adjustment were also examined. This chapter summarizes the findings of the study, and suggests areas for further research.

Representativeness of the Sample

This sample most likely differed from the larger population in gender, education, income, and ethnicity due to the nature of the solicitation effort. As it was the parents' children who initially volunteered themselves, and then volunteered their parents' names, a type of "double selection" process may have taken place. In other words, two generations had to feel sympathetic toward the purpose of the study before participating. It is possible that more women, and more educated, white subsamples of the population found more interest in the study compared to other groups.

Parents' Rate of Separation and Divorce

It appears that this sample of parents has had fewer experiences with their own marital separation and divorce than national samples. This finding calls into question the "transmission of marital instability phenomenon". However, a larger and more representative sample would be needed to better test the consistency of the phenomenon.

Keeping in mind such limitations in the present sample's representativeness, several conclusions about parents' reactions, coping, and adjustment can be made.

Parents' Prior Experience with Marital Separation

It appeared that the more experience parents had had with marital separation of their own parents, siblings, friends, or friends' children, the greater the likelihood that their child had discussed their marital problems with their parents. As noted below, parents who discussed marital problems with their children had less intense reactions, and showed more Active ways of coping. Thus it appears that open family communication about stressful family events facilitates the reduction of the stress on possibly all family members.

Parents' Perceptions of Child's Situation

Perceived financial burden was an important factor in the type of support network parents were likely to have (discussed below). Financial burden was also more likely to be reported for daughters. However, this was independent of whether there were grandchildren or not, which was not expected. It may be the case that daughters with children in this sample were more likely to obtain support from their separated husbands. Further data would be needed to substantiate such a hypothesis. Alternatively, it may be that the separated daughters, like women in the larger population, receive a lower income in general relative to their expenses.

Contrary to expectations, the child's initiator status of the separation was not related to any of the parent variables. While initiator status is clearly important to the separating couple (e.g., Hagestad & Smyer, 1981), it may be that it is an aspect of the countertransition that is less salient to the parent. Since it is the

aspect of perceived control that is important in initiator status, parents, who have little control over their child's situation may simply react to the disruptive situation in general.

Parents' Prior Relations with Child and Child-in-law

As expected, parents viewed their relations with their child in the year prior to the separation in a very positive light. Descriptions of their relations with their child-in-law were positive as well, but less extreme. An unexpected finding was that younger parents were more likely to describe more extreme qualities of the relationships with their child (more positive) and child-in-law (more negative). Little research exists as to why this might happen. One hypothesis is that a younger cohort of parents may feel freer to describe more intense emotions. Alternatively, Hagestad (1984) has suggested that "younger" middle-aged parents may focus more on their children compared to their aging parents, and thus have more of an emotional investment in their children. Emotional investment may also be involved in the relationship between presence of grandchildren and a greater degree of warmth in the older parents' relations with their child. This is consistent with reports of grandmother's perceptions of family, particularly views of grandchildren, and the role of grandmother reported by Johnson (1983).

Parents' positive or warm relations with both their child and child-in-law in the year prior to the separation were also related to the marital separation being an initial one. Again, it may be that parents' emotional investment in their child decreases by the time their child enters matrimony for a second or third time. This decrease in emotional investment (and possible reactivity) may also have been

sensed by the adult children, as they were more likely to discuss the possibility of separating with their parent(s) when the separation was not their first.

Parents' Reactions

Perhaps the clearest and most important finding was that these parents were not indifferent in their reaction to their child's separation. A small number of parents reported positive reactions, in contrast to both Kaslow and Hyatt's (1982) suggestion, and Hagestad, Smyer, and Stierman's (1984) report that such an event can be a positive, growing experience. Rather, reactions receiving high ratings included "sadness", "concern", "upset", "loss", similar to the findings by Eckels (1981) that such an event is seen as negative and stressful. Although there was some indication that there were clusters of reactions that included loss, relief, and responsibility, a larger sample of parents is needed to further explore such factors. In terms of Reactiveness, or intensity of reactions in general, the parents did not differ across age, gender, education, religion, or income. Thus, mothers did not react with more intensity than fathers, contrary to prediction. This lack of gender differences in stress appraisal has been noted by others (e.g., Paykel, Prusoff, & Uhlenhuth, 1971). What was related to a higher degree of Reactiveness were parent's reports of religious convictions (not religious affiliation) that made it difficult to accept marital separation, and the presence of grandchildren. Johnson (1983) has described how grandmothers sometimes identify themselves as "stabilizers" for their child and grandchildren experiencing a divorce. In order to act as a stabilizer, it may be that

a grandparent feels a heightened awareness of both their child and grandchildren's current stressful experiences, which may lead to an increase in their own reactivity. Parents with a higher percentage of support network members whose child had maritally separated also reported higher reactivity. Parents with such supports may have reported more intense reactions because of their empathy for others going through a similar process, and/or were more likely to simply acknowledge more intense reactions due to their greater exposure to this event. The question asking parents how they had attempted to cope had included as a prompt, previous experience with marital separation. As Table 4 indicates, one parent did describe drawing on a previous experience to cope with the event.

In regard to factors that reduced Reactiveness, parents' prior knowledge that their child had been experiencing marital problems seemed to help. If a high degree of Reactiveness can be considered a stressful experience, it may benefit the younger generation, who wishes to lessen the stress to their parents, to tell of their marital problems prior to the separation, rather than "spare" their parents of their difficulties. Again, open communication patterns among family members would appear to facilitate less stressful reactions on the part of older parents.

Parents' Coping

These parents described in their own words numerous ways in which they had attempted to cope with the event. Again, many reported that communicating with their child and child-in-law helped, perhaps as a means of decreasing their reactivity. Several also indicated that they had used prayer to cope. In regard to the parents' responses to a

list of coping behaviors described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), two types of coping behaviors were identified through cluster analysis; Avoidance and Active coping. Active coping is most likely a combination of what Lazarus and Folkman have described as "information seeking" and "seeking emotional support". Not surprisingly, Active coping, including such items as "talked to my child about my feelings", was related to parents' having knowledge about their child's marital problems. Furthermore, mothers were more likely to use this way of coping, suggesting that they are indeed active "kinkeepers". Avoidance coping, with items such as "wished the situation could go away", in contrast, was related to higher Reactiveness. If appraisal of stress (Reactiveness) and coping behaviors interrelate as a continuous process as Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest, it would appear that parents who use avoidance ways of coping may be avoiding the process completely, with the result being little decrease in perceived stress.

No age differences in Active or Avoidance coping were found, contrary to suggestions by Gutmann (1974), Vaillant (1977), and Pfeiffer (1977). It may be that if further information on parents' coping had been gathered (i.e., such as in-depth interviews used by Gutmann), differences across parent age would have been found.

Parents' Social Support

Social support, as another means of coping, was also utilized by this group of parents. Although the parents listed an average of five persons who had been supportive to them in regard to this event, three parents indicated that they had no one to provide them this particular support. Parent income was somewhat related to total support, perhaps

due to an increase in accessibility that can accompany higher income. In terms of relationships that the parents had to the support network members, the highest percentage was family members, followed by friends. This would suggest that kin does play an important role for parents attempting to deal with their child's separation, just as family support is important to the separating adult (e.g., Caldwell & Bloom, 1982). It is interesting to note, however, that when the parents perceived that their child's situation was or could become a financial burden, they were less likely to list family members as supports, and more likely to list friends as network members. Work by Spanier and Hanson (1982) may illuminate why this may be the case. In their study of the role of kin in adjustment to marital separation, support from kin was either unrelated or negatively related to the child's adjustment. They suggested that support from kin could be particularly detrimental when family sanctions such as criticism and disapproval of the separation were apparent. Since financial dependency by a separated adult child is probably seen as undesirable, the parents of financially dependent children may have avoided family criticism by seeking support from friends instead. It is also interesting to note that the parents who listed a decrease in contact with network members had more friends than family in their network. This finding is consistent with work by Alford (1982), who concluded that more intense and intimate relations can be found within kin relationships, compared to nonkin relationships.

In regard to parents' listings of support persons who were professionals, none listed a counselor, two listed a physician, and 10 parents listed a person of the clergy as a support. This is consistent with reports dated 1960, that people with marital problems were more

likely to consult a person from the clergy than a psychiatrist, psychologist, or marriage counselor. These reports also suggested that people who consulted clergy in regard to marital problems were more satisfied than those who saw a psychotherapist (Weinglass, Kressel, & Deutsch, 1978).

Parents' Present Relations with Child and Child-in-law

In general, parents' described their current relations with their child and child-in-law as more extreme than those they recalled during the year prior to the separation. Family loyalties seemed to come into play as, on the average, parents were likely to describe more distant, hostile current relationships with their child-in law, and warmer, more positive relations with their child. This latter finding is consistent with Hagestad, Smyer, and Stierman's (1984) report that divorcees believed their divorce had not affected their relationship with their parents, but when a change was noted, it was in a positive direction.

Statistically, there was no evidence that grandmothers attempted to form coalitions with daughter-in-laws to maintain contact with their grandchildren, as reported by Johnson (1983). However, several parents described their fear of decreased contact with their grandchildren in the future. Thus, the inclusion of a question about fear of decreased contact with grandchildren in the future may have been more informative.

Parents' Adjustment

In general, parents reported a slight increase in depressive symptoms, in psychophysiological symptoms, and a slight decrease in life satisfaction as the result of their child's marital separation, as

measured by change scores. Mothers' reports of higher levels of depressive and physical symptoms were consistent with other reports that women experience more of these symptoms than men (Clancey & Gove, 1974; Klerman & Weissman, 1980). A major factor that was related to higher levels of depression and physical symptoms for both men and women was higher levels of Reactiveness. This may be due to the fact that a majority of the reactions endorsed by the parents could be considered aspects of loss or grief. Thus, variables that could be considered "risk factors" for parents' adjustment include gender and high levels of reactivity.

Having family members in their social support network and high levels of support satisfaction were related to parents having fewer physical and depressive symptoms, even though percentage of family members and satisfaction were not related to lower reactivity. These findings suggest that a network that is perceived as supportive, or includes a high proportion of family members, can have positive effect on adjustment.

The Effects of Coping and Social Support on Adjustment

In regard to the effects of reactivity, coping, and social support on adjustment as computed through multiple regression equations, current depression was increased by Reactiveness and decreased by family support. In other words, the relationship between family support and depression was significant beyond the effect of Reactiveness (or stress). Although several other aspects of support and coping were significant in the equations, their potential effects were not as clear, as Reactiveness was not a significant predictor in the equations. The

only variables that were significantly related to life satisfaction in the multiple regression equations that were not related to adjustment measures were social support contact frequency (positively related) and Avoidance coping (negatively related). This lack of sensitivity of life satisfaction to stressful events is consistent with Zautra and Reich's (1983) conclusions regarding the impact of positive and negative life events on quality of life and psychological adjustment. In their review, they found that persons who had experienced negative events did not suffer significant detriment in quality of life ratings, but did appear more psychologically distressed. Thus, for persons considering future work in this area, it would seem that a life satisfaction measure may not be as sensitive to the impact of this particular stressful event as other psychological adjustment measures.

Conclusions

The marital separation of a child has generally negative effects on their older parent. Parents vary in their intensity of reactions to this event, according to perceived financial burden, parents' conflicting religious convictions, and presence of grandchildren related to increased intensity. The most common reactions that parents in this study reported included "loss", "concern", and "sadness", with a small minority reporting "relief". One factor related to lower intensity of reactions was parents' prior knowledge that their child had been experiencing marital problems.

Parents attempted to cope with this event through many means, the most common being communicating with their child, and prayer. Based on responses to a list of coping behaviors, clusters of Active coping and

Avoidance coping were identified. Increased Active coping was related to decreased depressive and psychophysiological symptoms, and a high frequency of Avoidance coping was related to decrements in life satisfaction ratings.

A specific aspect of parents' ways of coping that was examined was social support in regard to the event. Having a high percentage of family members in the social network, as well as being satisfied with support, was related to better adjustment.

Future researchers of this topic may wish to consider more in depth investigation of how family support, including contact with the separated child, their spouse, and possible grandchildren, affects older parents' adjustment. Quality of discussions of the child's marital problems between parent and child prior to separation also merit further examination. Larger samples, with more diverse socio-economic statuses, would also allow for testing of hypotheses regarding the possible differential impact of this event across SES. Finally, research including a follow-up component measuring later reactions, coping, and adjustment would also be informative, given that parents do recall reactions up to eight years ago (see Chapter I), and that children of divorced parents continue to describe distress up to ten years after their parents' divorce (Wallerstein, 1985).

In terms of implications for marital and family therapy, the findings presented here suggest several considerations. Couples who are experiencing marital difficulties and perceive separation and divorce as the best solution should be encouraged to discuss this possibility with their parents if they wish to facilitate less intense reactions by their

parents. Therapists of multi-generational families experiencing marital discord may better facilitate family adjustment through better understanding about the older parents' religious conflicts concerning divorce, the older parents' perceived support from family members, and the older parents' possible fears of losing contact with grandchildren.

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APPENDIX A

_____ YES, I am interested in participating in the marital disruption study.

Please send me _____ questionnaire(s), as my spouse is/is not interested in participating as well.

_____ NO, I am not interested in participating in the marital disruption study.

NAME _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE AND ZIP CODE _____

PHONE _____

Date

Name

Address

Dear (older parent's name):

I am currently conducting a study examining how the marital separation of an adult child affects their parents. Your name and address was obtained from (separated child's name) who is participating in the study.

Although we are beginning to understand how a marital separation affects the persons experiencing it, as well as how it affects their children, we know very little about how the older parent or grandparent reacts and adjusts to their child's marital separation.

The study that I am currently conducting asks parents of children who have maritally separated in the two years to fill out an anonymous and confidential questionnaire. Included in the questionnaire are questions about 1) your reactions, 2) your prior experiences with persons who have had marital problems, 3) your present physical and psychological health, and 4) questions about any help or coping strategies that you may have sought to deal with your child's marital separation.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete and return to me the postage-paid postcard enclosed. An anonymous questionnaire, along with a postage-paid return envelope will be sent to you, and that will be the extent of your participation in the study.

Although I cannot provide any direct payment or benefit to you for your time and effort in completing the questionnaire, I can send you group results of the study. You can indicate your interest in obtaining results of the study at the end of the questionnaire.

I hope that you will decide to participate in this research, so that we can better understand how a marital separation affects the family, including you, and hopefully provide better services to those who request it.

Sincerely,

Jane L. Pearson, M.A.

Date

Name

Address

Dear (older parent's name):

About a month ago you should have received a questionnaire asking about your reactions to your child's marital separation. If you have completed it, and it's in the mail, I thank you.

If you have not completed it, but plan to, I would appreciate your completing it and sending it to me in the postage-paid envelope provided as soon as possible.

If you have decided not to complete it, do not return the questionnaire.

If you have any questions or reservations about the questionnaire, please feel free to call me at 517-355-9561, and I will get back to you.

Thank you for your anticipated participation.

Sincerely,

Jane L. Pearson, M.A.

APPENDIX B

Michigan State University

Department of Psychology

PARENTAL ADJUSTMENT TO CHILD'S MARITAL SEPARATION STUDY

Consent Form

I freely consent to take part in the doctoral dissertation study of how the marital separation of my adult child affects me as an older parent, conducted by Jane Pearson, M.A., Department of Psychology, Michigan State University.

I have received a clear explanation of my part in this study, which is to complete an anonymous questionnaire.

I understand that I am free to discontinue my participation in the study at any time without penalty.

I understand that the results of the study will be treated in strict confidentiality and that I will remain anonymous. Within these restrictions, results of the study will be made available to me at my request.

I understand that my participation in the study does not guarantee any beneficial results to me.

I understand that, at my request, I can receive additional explanation of the study after my participation is completed.

I understand that my compliance in completing the questionnaire constitutes my informed consent for participation in the study.

Signed _____

Date _____

PARENTAL ADJUSTMENT TO CHILD'S SEPARATION QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is to only be filled out by persons who have an adult child who has separated from their spouse in the last six months. If you have more than one child who has maritally separated in the last six months, please answer all questions in response to the child who has most recently separated.

DIRECTIONS

The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain information about how the parents of adult children react and adjust to their adult child's marital separation.

Please fill out the questionnaire without consulting anyone. There are no right or wrong answers. We want to know what your reaction is to your child's separation. Your answers will be completely anonymous and confidential, so please answer as honestly as you can.

Read the questions carefully before answering. Most answers will involve circling or checking a response that represents you. Other questions will ask you to explain something in your own words.

When you have completed the questionnaire, return it, along with your consent form, and request for results if you wish, in the postage-paid return envelope.

Today's Date _____

1. First of all, we would like some general information about your separated son or daughter. Please circle one:

1 MY SON HAS SEPARATED FROM HIS SPOUSE
IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS

2 MY DAUGHTER HAS SEPARATED FROM HER
SPOUSE IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS

2. What is the age of the son or daughter who separated?

3. Is this the first time your son or daughter has separated?

1 YES

2 NO

4. Does he or she have any children from their (most recent) marriage?

1 YES

2 NO

5. If yes, what are their ages? _____

6. Which of the following statements best describes your relationship with your child during the year prior to their marital separation?

1 VERY CLOSE AND WARM

2 SOMEWHAT CLOSE

3 INDIFFERENT

4 DISTANT AND COOL

5 HOSTILE

7. Which of the following statements best describes your relationship with your child at the present time?

1 VERY CLOSE AND WARM

2 SOMEWHAT CLOSE

3 INDIFFERENT

4 DISTANT AND COOL

5 HOSTILE

8. Which of the following statements best describes your relationship with your son/daughter-in-law in the year prior to your child's separation from them?

1 VERY CLOSE AND WARM

2 SOMEWHAT CLOSE

3 INDIFFERENT

4 DISTANT AND COOL

5 HOSTILE

9. Which of the following statements best describes your relationship with your son/daughter-in-law at the present time?

- 1 VERY CLOSE AND WARM
- 2 SOMEWHAT CLOSE
- 3 INDIFFERENT
- 4 DISTANT AND COOL
- 5 HOSTILE

10. Is your child's marital separation a financial burden for you?

- 1 YES
- 2 NO

Please explain: _____

11. If no, do you believe that it could become a financial burden for you in the future?

- 1 YES
- 2 NO

12. When did you first learn of your child's separation, or plans to separate from his or her spouse?

- 1 WITHIN THE LAST MONTH
- 2 TWO OR THREE MONTHS AGO
- 3 FOUR OR FIVE MONTHS AGO
- 4 SIX MONTHS AGO
- 5 MORE THAN SIX MONTHS AGO

13. How did you hear about it? Please explain: _____

14. Which of the following statements is most true? "My belief is that my child's marital separation was..."

- 1 MOSTLY MY CHILD'S DECISION
- 2 MOSTLY MY SON/DAUGHTER-IN-LAW'S DECISION
- 3 A MUTUAL DECISION

15. Please describe the best you can your first reaction to your child's marital separation: _____

16. Which of the following statements are true about your reaction? Please circle "T" for true, and "F" for false for each statement.

- T F I HAD NO IDEA MY CHILD HAD MARITAL PROBLEMS
- T F I HAD WONDERED IF MY CHILD HAD MARITAL PROBLEMS
- T F I STRONGLY SUSPECTED MY CHILD HAD MARITAL PROBLEMS
- T F MY CHILD HAD TALKED TO ME OPENLY ABOUT THEIR MARITAL PROBLEMS

Other people have reported the following reactions to their child's divorce. Some of these reactions may be similar to your own, and others may not.

17. To what degree was your reaction like those listed below? Please circle a number from 1 to 5 on each scale, where 1 represents "not at all my reaction", and 5 represents "very much my reaction".

	NOT AT ALL MY REACTION	VERY MUCH LIKE MY REACTION
ANGER	1 2 3 4 5	
JOY	1 2 3 4 5	
GUILT	1 2 3 4 5	
EMBARRASSMENT	1 2 3 4 5	
LOSS	1 2 3 4 5	
FEELING RESPONSIBLE	1 2 3 4 5	

	NOT AT ALL MY REACTION	VERY MUCH LIKE MY REACTION
RELIEF	1 2 3 4 5	
SADNESS	1 2 3 4 5	
SURPRISE	1 2 3 4 5	
FEELING BURDENED	1 2 3 4 5	
DISAPPOINTMENT	1 2 3 4 5	
FEAR	1 2 3 4 5	
INDIFFERENCE	1 2 3 4 5	
BITTERNESS	1 2 3 4 5	
DISMAY	1 2 3 4 5	
CONCERN	1 2 3 4 5	
POWERLESSNESS	1 2 3 4 5	
UPSET	1 2 3 4 5	
HAD MIXED FEELINGS	1 2 3 4 5	

18. Have you ever been separated or divorced?

- 1 YES
- 2 NO

19. If yes, when was your most recent separation or divorce?

- 1 IN THE LAST YEAR
- 2 TWO TO FIVE YEARS AGO
- 3 SIX TO TEN YEARS AGO
- 4 ELEVEN TO 20 YEARS AGO

20. What is your present marital status?

- 1 MARRIED
- 2 SEPARATED
- 3 DIVORCED
- 4 WIDOWED

21. Have you had a relative, friend, or any other person important to you separate or divorce? Please check all appropriate blanks.

- ☐ I HAVE ANOTHER CHILD WHO HAS SEPARATED/DIVORCED
- ☐ ONE OF MY PARENTS HAD SEPARATED/DIVORCED
- ☐ I HAVE A BROTHER OR SISTER WHO HAS SEPARATED/DIVORCED
- ☐ A FRIEND HAS SEPARATED/DIVORCED
- ☐ A FRIEND OR RELATIVE HAS HAD A CHILD WHO HAS SEPARATED/DIVORCED

22. Have you found that your own religious convictions have made it difficult for you to accept or adapt to your child's marital separation?

- 1 YES
- 2 NO

Please explain:

23. Now we would like to know what strategies you have used to cope with your child's marital separation. Please describe the best you can any events or experiences that seem to help, or hinder, your coping with your child's separation. (You may wish to include the events just listed, such as a best friend's experience with divorce, or activities such as praying, gardening, etc.):

IF YOU NEED MORE ROOM TO WRITE, PLEASE CONTINUE ON THE BACK OF THIS PAGE.

24. Listed below are ways people have described their coping strategies. Please check whether you have felt or behaved in these ways as you have coped with your reaction to your child's separation.

	NEVER	SOME	A LOT		NEVER	SOME	A LOT
Tried to learn from the situation				Discussed the situation with someone			
Drew on past experience of a similar situation				Accepted my strong feelings			
Changed or grew as a person in a good way				Told myself I was not responsible			
Wished that I could change what happened				Wished I could change the way I felt			
Imagined a better place and time than the one I was in				Felt bad that I couldn't avoid the situation			
Changed myself so I could deal with it better				Wished the situation could go away or be over with			
Took it out on other people, somehow				Felt better by crying			
Just kept feelings to myself				Tried to go on as if nothing had happened			
Didn't let it get to me; I refused to think about it				Blamed myself			
Found new faith or some important truth in life				Turned to activities to keep my mind off the problem			
Kept others from knowing how I was feeling				Sought emotional support from my friends and family			
Prayed about it				Hoped a miracle would happen			
Looked for the brighter side; a "silver lining"				Rediscovered what is important in life			
Re-examined my goals regarding my child				Counted my blessings			
Took deep breaths and/or meditated				Waited to see what would happen			
Tried to find out more about the situation				Let my feelings out somehow			
Took a big chance or did something risky				Anticipated difficulty and tried to prepare myself emotionally			
Tried to see something humorous in the situation				Asked someone I respected for advice and followed it			

24. continued

	NEVER	SOME	A LOT		NEVER	SOME	A LOT
Avoided being with people for a while				Just took one step at a time			
Felt better by drinking, eating or smoking				Slept more than usual			
Got away for a while; tried to take a vacation				Had a fantasy about how things might turn out			
Talked to my child about my feelings				Went over the situation again and again trying to understand it			
Wished I were a stronger person							

25. Which of the following statements are true about your coping with your child's separation?

PRESENTLY:

- T F CONTACT WITH MY CHILD MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR ME TO COPE
- T F CONTACT WITH MY CHILD MAKES IT EASIER FOR ME TO COPE
- T F CONTACT WITH MY SON/DAUGHTER-IN-LAW MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR ME TO COPE
- T F CONTACT WITH MY SON/DAUGHTER-IN-LAW MAKES IT EASIER FOR ME TO COPE

IN THE FUTURE:

- T F CONTACT WITH MY CHILD WOULD MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR ME TO COPE
- T F CONTACT WITH MY CHILD WOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR ME TO COPE
- T F CONTACT WITH MY SON/DAUGHTER-IN-LAW WOULD MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR ME TO COPE
- T F CONTACT WITH MY SON/DAUGHTER-IN-LAW WOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR ME TO COPE

26. What is each person's
relationship to you?

KEY
Please write in,
for example,
1. spouse
2. minister,
etc.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Please turn to the next
half page

27. Have any of these people
experienced a separation
or divorce themselves?

KEY
0 = DON'T KNOW
1 = YES
2 = NO

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Please turn to the
next half page

28. Do any of these people
have a son or daughter
who has been separated
or divorced?

KEY

0 = DON'T KNOW
1 = YES
2 = NO

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Please turn to the next
half page

29. Have there been any changes
in the frequency of your
contacts with these persons
since your child's marital
separation?

KEY

1 = SIGNIFICANT
DECREASE
2 = SLIGHT DECREASE
3 = NO CHANGE
4 = SLIGHT INCREASE
5 = SIGNIFICANT
INCREASE

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Please turn to the next
half page

30. To what extent have you
talked with each person
about your child's
separation?

KEY

- 1 = NONE AT ALL
- 2 = A LITTLE
- 3 = SOME
- 4 = QUITE A LOT
- 5 = A GREAT DEAL

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Please turn so that all
the half pages are up

The next questions ask about who may have provided you with personal support regarding your child's marital separation.

Please list each important person in your life who provides you with personal support in the LEFT column. You may wish to consider relatives, friends, work associates, neighbors, clergy, family physician, or other professionals. Use only first names or initials.

Next, answer the questions on the half sheet on the RIGHT that refer to each of the persons you listed, by writing the appropriate number based on each KEY next to each question.

List of important
persons: First
names or initials

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

31. How satisfied are you with
the support received from
this person in regard to
your child's separation?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

KEY
0 = NOT APPLICABLE
1 = NOT AT ALL
SATISFIED
2 = A LITTLE SATISFIED
3 = SOMEWHAT SATISFIED
4 = MODERATELY
SATISFIED
5 = VERY SATISFIED

Please check the box that indicates how much of the time you felt or behaved this way in the six months before you heard about your child's marital separation.

[illegible]

Please lift this half page

CES-D

32. Below are some statements about how you might have felt or behaved.

Please check the box that indicates how much of the time you felt or behaved this way since you heard about your child's marital separation.

	Rarely	Some	Moderately	All
a. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.				
b. I did not feel like eating: My appetite was poor.				
c. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from family or friends.				
d. I felt that I was just as good as other people.				
e. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.				
f. I felt depressed.				
g. I felt that everything I did was an effort.				
h. I felt hopeful about the future.				
i. I thought my life had been a failure.				
j. I felt fearful.				
k. My sleep was restless.				
l. I was happy.				
m. I talked less than usual.				
n. I felt lonely.				
o. I felt that people were unfriendly.				
p. I enjoyed life.				
q. I had crying spells.				
r. I felt sad.				
s. I felt that people disliked me.				
t. I could not get "going".				

Please check the box that indicates how much of the time this symptom occurred in the six months before you heard about your child's marital separation.

[illegible]

Please turn this half page up.

COMPOSITE SYMPTOM CHECKLIST

33. Below is a list of symptoms.

Please check the box that indicates how much of the time this symptom occurred in the six months since you heard about your child's marital separation.

	Never	Some- times	Pretty often	Nearly all the time
a. Did you ever tend to lose or gain weight when you had something important bothering you?				
b. Were you ever bothered by having an upset, acid, or sour stomach?				
c. Did you ever feel you were bothered by all sorts of pains and ailments in different parts of your body?				
d. Did you ever tend to feel tired in the morning or find it difficult to get up in the morning?				
e. Did you ever have loss of appetite?				
f. Were you ever troubled by headaches or pains in the head?				
g. Were you ever troubled by your hands or feet sweating so that you felt damp and clammy?				
h. Did you ever feel that you were going to have a nervous breakdown?				
i. Did you ever faint or black out?				
j. Were there ever times when you could not take care of things because you just couldn't get going?				
k. Were you ever bothered by your heart pounding?				
l. Were you ever bothered by shortness of breath when you were not exercising or working hard?				
m. Did you ever have any nightmares?				
n. Did your hands ever tremble enough to bother you?				

Please check the box that indicates how much of the time this symptom occurred in the six months before you heard about your child's marital separation.

Never	Some- times	Pretty often	Nearly all the time

Please lift this half page

33. continued

Please check the box that indicates how much of the time this symptom occurred in the six months since you heard about your child's marital separation.

	Never	Some- times	Pretty often	Nearly all the time
o. Were you ever troubled by "cold sweats"?				
p. Did you ever have any trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep?				
q. Were you ever bothered by nervousness, feeling fidgety, or tenseness?				
r. Did you ever have spells of dizziness?				
s. Did any ill health ever affect the amount of work you did?				
t. Did you ever feel weak all over?				
u. For the most part did you feel healthy enough to carry out the things you wanted to do?				
v. Did you have any particular physical or health problem?				

Please check the box that indicates how you felt about each of these areas in the six months prior to hearing about your child's marital separation.

[illegible]

Please lift this half page

OTS

34. Below is a list of short questions.

Please check the box that indicates how you felt about each of these areas since hearing about your child's marital separation.

	De- lighted	Pleased	Mixed	Dis- pleased	Ter- rible
a. How do you feel about your life as a whole?					
b. How do you feel about yourself?					
c. The way you handle problems that come up in your life?					
d. Your house or apartment?					
e. What you are accomplishing in your life?					
f. How do you feel about your work?					
g. The amount of fun and enjoyment you have?					
h. Your health and physical condition?					
i. Your emotional and psychological well-being?					
j. How do you feel about your income?					
k. The extent to which you are developing yourself and broadening your life?					
l. The amount of pressure you are under?					
m. The extent to which you can adjust to changes in your life?					
n. The responsibilities you have for members of your family?					
o. How much you are accepted and included by others?					
p. How much you are accepted and included by close adult relatives?					
q. How do you feel about your friends?					
r. The chance you have to know people with whom you can really feel comfortable?					
s. And last, a very general question: How do you feel about your life as a whole?					

Finally, we would like some background information. As with the rest of the questionnaire, all information on this page will be kept completely anonymous and confidential.

35. What is your sex?

- 1 MALE
- 2 FEMALE

36. What is your age?

37. Which is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- 1 NO FORMAL EDUCATION
- 2 SOME GRADE SCHOOL
- 3 COMPLETED GRADE SCHOOL
- 4 SOME HIGH SCHOOL
- 5 COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL
- 6 SOME COLLEGE
- 7 COMPLETED COLLEGE
- 8 SOME GRADUATE WORK
- 9 A GRADUATE DEGREE

38. What is your racial or ethnic background?

- 1 WHITE
- 2 BLACK
- 3 HISPANIC
- 4 AMERICAN INDIAN
- 5 ORIENTAL
- 6 OTHER (please specify) _____

39. Which of the following income groups best describes your family's current income?

- 1 UNDER \$4,999
- 2 5,000 - 9,999
- 3 10,000 - 14,999
- 4 15,000 - 19,999
- 5 20,000 - 24,999
- 6 25,000 - 29,999
- 7 30,000 - 34,999
- 8 35,000 - 39,999
- 9 40,000 AND OVER

40. What is your occupation? If you are retired, what was your occupation before retirement? _____

41. If you have not been employed outside the home, what is (or was) your spouse's occupation? _____

42. Are you responsible for the care of an elderly parent or in-law?

- 1 YES
- 2 NO

43. What would you say is your present religious orientation or tradition? Please circle, and specify sect or subgroup:

- | | SECT OR SUBGROUP |
|--------------|------------------|
| 1 PROTESTANT | _____ |
| 2 CATHOLIC | _____ |
| 3 JEWISH | _____ |
| 4 OTHER | _____ |
| 5 NONE | |

Thank you for your time and effort in completing this questionnaire.

Do you have any comments, criticisms, or suggestions to improve the questionnaire? Were there any important questions that we missed?

44. Please explain:

If you are interested in receiving a copy of the results of this study,
please fill out the information below, and detach it from the rest
of the questionnaire.

NAME _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE AND ZIP CODE _____

Would you like a referral in the Lansing area to discuss your feelings
about your child's marital separation? Please indicate your
phone number here: _____
(area code)

Do you know of anyone else who also has a son or daughter who has
recently separated, who might be interested in completing the
questionnaire? A postcard will be sent to them, asking if they
are interested in filling out the questionnaire.

NAME _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE AND ZIP CODE _____

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