

Accelerated Adulthood: Narratives of Children of Divorce Growing up Faster

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ABSTRACT:

Research on the effects of divorce on children is an area in the literature that has been extensively studied. However, much of the literature overlooks the potential long term repercussions for these children, especially with regard to feeling they grew up faster as a direct consequence of their parent's separation. The present study fills this gap by examining the narratives of young adults and their experiences of subjectively maturing quicker. By analyzing in-depth interviews with twenty college aged students, I attempted to understand the reasons why these children felt an increase in their subjective age following their parent's divorce. Children feel that experiencing parental divorce made them grow up faster in three primary areas: parent-child relationships, sibling relationships, and the use of divorce as a learning experience. Implications from the study and possible directions of future research on the topic will be discussed.

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INTRODUCTION:

Divorce is something that is typically understood as a phenomenon that is declining in our society today, however, it is still an incredibly common occurrence in the United States with nearly 40-50% of first time marriages ultimately ending in divorce. Further, around 50% of children in the United States will witness their parents' divorce in their lifetime, and of that 50%, half of those children will witness a second parental divorce. With these statistics affecting such a large portion of the population, it is imperative to look at the implications parental divorce has for the children involved.

There has been a large body of research in the past that looks at the effects of parental divorce on children. Much of this older research primarily focused on factors such as psychological well-being (Amato, Loomis, and Booth 1995). More recent studies, however, have tried to broaden the research and focus on other important outcomes along with psychological well-being such as: children's behavioral problems, social relationships and support networks, quality of relationships, and academic attainment (Booth & Amato 2001). These results showed that children generally suffer more adverse effects if their parent's marriage was low- conflict, compared to those children whose parents were involved in more high conflict marriages. This is important to consider, as it may help to identify a pattern in seeing which children may be more affected by their parent's divorce. In addition, literature from the past tended to find that divorce had significant negative implications on children of divorce. More recent studies, however, have not been able to establish concrete results lending to either positive or negative effects. The literature in general, however, has greatly neglected the ways in which children of divorce are still affected into early adulthood. Further, it has overlooked the notion of understanding the

ways in which divorce influences the affected children to grow up faster, and how this still plays a part in their daily life as young adults.

In this study, I set out to examine the factors that cause variation in the ways children experience their parents' divorce. I attempted to bridge the gap in research by sampling young adults and asking them to detail what they could remember, primarily seeking explanations to answer my original research question as to why children experience a variation of effects following the separation. Participants instead overwhelmingly created a narrative around their perceived experience of growing up subjectively faster as a result of their parent's separation. This narrative acted as a means to address my initial questions, but also as a way for them to tell their stories of how they felt their parent's divorce ultimately influenced them to mature more quickly, and why. In this study I argue this accelerated step into adolescence happens owing to three main reasons: parent relationship, the sibling relationships, and the ongoing use of divorce as a learning experience.

To gather my research, I conducted in-depth interviews with twenty individuals whose parents incurred a divorce at some point in their lives. Participants were ages 18-24 and were currently enrolled as students at the University of Colorado Boulder. By using the method of semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect my data, it allowed participants the ability to elaborate in great detail on certain questions, and provide minimal responses as they saw fit on others. It was through these answers, that their narratives of an increase in their perceived subjective age emerged. To truly understand these subjective narratives, I had the interviews professionally transcribed. Then, I inductively analyzed the data to better understand the different factors and explanations children attribute their growing up faster to.

This research is important as it provides new insight about the effects of divorce on children once they officially leave childhood behind in the pursuit of adolescence. Through looking explicitly at the experiences of college aged participants, we can understand the ways in which young adults construct their personal accounts around their parent's divorce. Though researching the effects of divorce on children during their childhood is also significant, I chose to focus on the sample at hand, as it has far less research done on the college demographic. This is particularly interesting to look at, as with the transition to college comes new viewpoints, and perhaps an entirely different narrative than one they would have constructed as a child. It is because the mature age of the participants at the time of the interviews that makes this research imperative to conduct in connection with the idea of subjective age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The topic of divorce has been extensively researched across multiple domains. Researchers in the areas of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and several other fields have studied different facets of divorce ranging from the reasons why it happens, to the rates in certain populations, to the effects of divorce on the ex-spouses. There have also been countless studies done that attempt to acknowledge the implications of divorce for the children involved. As the study at hand seeks to understand the ways in which children experience their parent's divorce, this section will primarily focus on that area. However, I will begin with a small segment on pertinent background information.

A Decline in Marriage Culture and the Rise of a Divorce Culture

In American society today, a decline in the "marriage culture," that no longer sees marriage as lasting forever, or divorce as a last resort, is occurring (Hackstaff, 2010). According

to Contemporary Council on Families (CCF) study, today more than 45% of adults ages 18 and older remain unmarried, a large increase compared to the only 28% of adults who chose to do so back in 1970 (DePaulo, 2017). Not only though are fewer people in today's American society getting married, but we are also seeing an increase in the number of people ultimately getting divorced. With this, also comes the emergence of a new culture, a "divorce culture," which Hackstaff defined as "A set of symbols, beliefs, and practices that anticipate and reinforce divorce and in the process, redefines marriage" (2010:1). Due to the recent nationwide passing of the "no fault divorce" in 2010, meaning a couple is not required by law to state the reason for the marriage dissolution, there were an increase in number of divorces recorded in the years following (Coontz, 2014). However, many researchers have speculated that over time, this statistic has leveled out since the implementation of the no fault divorce law, and has even seen a decline in the rates in recent years. By looking at the chart from the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) rate trends, we can see these changes regarding the spike of divorce rates in 2010/2011 following the introduction of this new law, illustrated below in the figure (Center For Disease Control). This timeline is important to my research as this may have been around the time the parents of many the participants in my study divorced.

Provisional number of divorces and annulments and rate: United States, 2000-2016

Year	Divorces & annulments	Population	Rate per 1,000 total population
2016/1	827,261	257,904,548	3.2
2015/2	800,909	258,518,265	3.1
2014/2	813,862	256,483,624	3.2
2013/2	832,157	254,408,815	3.3
2012/3	851,000	248,041,986	3.4
2011/3	877,000	246,273,366	3.6
2010/3	872,000	244,122,529	3.6
2009/3	840,000	242,610,561	3.5
2008/3	844,000	240,545,163	3.5
2007/3	856,000	238,352,850	3.6
2006/3	872,000	236,094,277	3.7
2005/3	847,000	233,495,163	3.6
2004/4	879,000	236,402,656	3.7
2003/5	927,000	243,902,090	3.8
2002/6	955,000	243,108,303	3.9
2001/7	940,000	236,416,762	4.0
2000/7	944,000	233,550,143	4.0

¹ Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Minnesota, and New Mexico.

² Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, and Minnesota.

³ Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, and Minnesota.

⁴ Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, and Louisiana.

⁵ Excludes data for California, Hawaii, Indiana, and Oklahoma.

⁶ Excludes data for California, Indiana, New York City, and Oklahoma.

⁷ Excludes data for California, Indiana, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

Effects of Divorce on Children

When it comes to divorce, it is almost certain that it will have some sort of impact on the children involved. The effects can appear to be big or small, obvious or transparent, and even good or bad. One thing is for certain though, with so many children being involved in these parental divorces annually, it is essential that researchers look at the countless different ways that children may be affected, both looking to the past and the present as well.

Much of the earliest research on the topic concluded that divorce generally had “detrimental effects” to a child’s outcomes (Sorosky 1977). Since then, research has progressed, however, still tends to highlight the countless negative consequences resulting from children’s experiences of their parents’ divorce. These studies tended to focus on the well-being and behavioral consequences for the involved children. This research dating before the 2000’s, such as an initial review of the literature done in 1991 looking at over 13,000 children, believed that children of divorced families scored lower on ratings of well-being, social adjustment, and self-concept when compared with children in intact families (Amato & Keith 1991). The authors went on to state that with this conclusion however, that it was a relatively low effect size. This finding contrasts some of the even earlier literature that believed that divorce had truly detrimental effects. They further speculated that this difference in significance in the findings could be attributed to the change in divorce becoming more socially acceptable as time has gone on. Along with this initial meta-analysis, several more studies were continued in the 1990’s that ultimately confirmed these negative effects on children of divorce. Other studies focused on similar things such as the negative behavioral issues (Cherlin et. al, 1991), problems in academic achievement due to lack of parental involvement (Astone & McLanahan 1991), problems with psychological adjustment (Forehand et al 1994), and varying problems with self-conception

(Wenk et al. 1994), and self-esteem (Amato 2000). With these past findings in this “first generation of research” it appears as though the odds do not look good for the outcomes in children of divorce. And further that it seems that divorce regularly leads to adverse repercussions in these earlier dated studies on the topic.

Many studies however, have also sought to understand the possible positive effects of divorce on the offspring. In cases where the marriages are high in conflict, Jekielek concluded that the children actually scored higher on many outcomes relating to well-being when their parents got divorced compared to had they remained married (Jekielek 1998). Another meta-analysis conducted by Amato just ten years later agreed with this notion believing that children removed from these hostile environments may ultimately benefit from this, at least in the long term. (Amato 2001). Generally, though this experience can act as a positive effect in some children by removing them from the situation, it is important to note that the majority of the literature still agrees that divorce typically results in some degree of unfavorable outcomes.

More recent studies suggest that divorce, in and of itself, is perhaps not the cause of a variety of elevated problems we see in children of divorce (Aughinbaugh, Pierret, & Rothstein, 2005; Li, 2007). Largely, this conclusion has been attributed to negative factors that were present in the children pre divorce that persisted in the children’s lives post-divorce as well. In both aforementioned studies, when controlling for certain factors, it was concluded that there were no differences in the children whose parents were divorced vs. those children whose parents were intact. Li’s 2007 study went even further by stating that they believed the children being researched would have turned out relatively the same regardless as to whether or not their parents had stayed together. With the recent research indicating a need to understand whether or not the relationship between parental divorce and an array of child problems are truly correlated,

we must first understand the potential common reasons as to why children are effected by their parents' divorce.

Why Divorce Affects Children

Children are incredibly malleable and are easily shaped by their experiences, be that good or bad. However, do certain aspects of their parent's divorce carry more weight in the ways that they are affected when compared with one another? Research has shown that inter parental conflict is one of the biggest reasons that children fare negatively following the dissolution of their parent's marriage. In Amato and Keith's 1991 meta-analysis, they refer to this dealing with parental discord before and during the divorce as the "Family Conflict Perspective," and found the strongest support for this theory when compared with two others presented. Emery's 1982 study also found a clear link between child behavioral problems and discord in divorce. This finding has been replicated and found to be consistently one of the greatest influences on children's negative outcomes (Long&Forehand, 1987; Grynych& Fincham,1990; Jekielek,1998). Another finding cites the addition of witnessing domestic violence along with inter parental conflict as an even greater predictor of emotional distress in these children (Ayoub et al. 1999). A further study by Davies and Cummings (1994), found that these cases of marital conflict results the child feeling a perceived lack of emotional security, lending to potential adjustment problems.

Inter parental conflict is certainly not the only reason as to why children are affected in some way as a consequence of the dissolution of their parent's marriage. Another large focus in this regard is centered around a child's coping mechanisms, or lack thereof. Hetherington's 1984 study suggested that a child's ability to cope with certain stressors of divorce was contingent upon their age and level of understanding. Therefore it can be assumed that children who are

unable to cope with the divorce will be more likely to be adversely affected by it. Grynh and Finchams previously discussed article stressed the importance of coping skills in children as necessary to be able to specifically deal with inter parental conflict (Grynh& Fincham,1990). An additional article found a critical link between coping efficacy (defined as “the belief one can deal both with the demands made and the emotions aroused by a situation”) and psychological problems in children on divorce (Sandler et al., 2000:1099). Here, one can see the importance of having adequate coping mechanisms, and further how children of divorce may be negatively affected should they lack them.

One final primary area of research that helps to explain why children are affected by their parent’s separations is the post-divorce parent-child relationship. It has been found that following the divorce, children tend to have a significant decrease in the amount of interaction with the non-custodial parent. Along with this, the custodial parent is also generally less involved because they are unable to spend as much time with the child due to other life constraints (Amato, 2000). Other prior studies have similarly found that parents may become less supportive, provide a smaller amount of supervision, and sometimes engage in more conflict with their children following the divorce (Astone& McLanahan, 1991; Thompson et al., 1992). With children potentially losing those close bonds that are essential to their proper development, it is evident why post-divorce parent child relationships are a key factor in determining the child’s outcomes.

Differing Effects for Different Children

Though above I outlined some of the primary reasons for children being affected by their parent’s separation, there is of course substantial variation based on the characteristics of the child. An early study on divorce done by Herzog and Sudia (1973), conceded that divorce does not have uniform ramifications in children. Following this, literature began to focus on the ways

that children are affected differently and why. The focus in this review will be on 4 main factors that cause variation in effects of divorce: age, gender, siblings, and race.

Age

The age of the child at the time of the divorce may be an essential element in predicting his or her outcome. In Amato and Keith's 1991 meta-analysis, it was found that age was significantly correlated with a number of factors including psychological and social adjustments. Further, they expressed that the age of which children had the largest effect sizes were in the age range of primary school and high school (Amato & Keith 1991). In another study, it was established that the strongest effects were generally occurring with the youngest age group, and the weakest effects in the oldest. It, however, also states that this may be due to the time elapsed between the separation and their current age of the subject being studied rather than a true association (Allison, 1989). On the other hand, Kalter and Rembar (1981) did not find a relationship between the age of the child at the time of the divorce when the child was later evaluated for emotional adjustment issues. This was also cited to being similar to an excerpt from Emery's 1988 book that deduced it's nearly impossible to assume a relationship with age and effect due to the countless confounds. With the discrepancy as to whether or not age may have an effect on the child's well-being following divorce, it is critical to continue to study this in the future. The current study will give further insight to the age range when participants appeared to be most affected.

Gender

With regard to gender, there has been a change in the discourse as to who is more or less affected, but it still seems to remain somewhat of a mystery to researchers. Earlier research suggested that divorce was more severely impacting young boys than young girls (McCall&

Stocking, 1980). In a later article, with a longitudinal study of nearly 1,200 children, it was found that boys were not actually being affected more, but rather showed an inverse relationship with the girls in the study being slightly more affected (Allison 1989). In 1988 and 1989 Zaslow decided to conduct a two part review of all existing literature on gender differences in children of divorce to explore the seemingly mixed results in literature. In the initial review in 1988, she found that in 27 studies done by research experts in the field, seventeen found boys to be more adversely affected. However, it was also found that in six of the studies she looked at, that no sex differences were found. Finally, in another five articles, it was found the daughters actually fared worse following the dissolution of their parents' marriage (Zaslow, 1988.) Her second review continued this examination of past literature on the topic and further supported the work from a year prior citing many discrepancies still found in the literature on sex differences in post-divorce adjustment. Additionally, she instead emphasized the need to consider perceived gender differences with regard to post divorce family relations for the most accurate understanding on this topic. (Zaslow, 1989). In recent years very little literature has been published on the topic of gender differences within children of divorce, however my study will attempt to address this discrepancy.

Sibling Relations

An individual's sibling relationships or lack thereof can be another component that can lead to varying effects in children of divorce. One study found having siblings leads to better outcomes in children of divorce, specifically in regard to exhibiting less external problems than children of divorce who do not have siblings (Kempton et al. 1991). In another study, the researchers focused on gender in conjecture with sibling pairs and conceded that older boys dyads were more prone to negative interactions and involvement in conflict (MacKinnon 1989).

A more recent study found that divorce was not something generally discussed between siblings. This was attributed to a possible age difference in some pairs where one sibling wouldn't be able to truly understand it, let alone discuss it (Jennings & Howe 2001). Though not much is known currently about sibling relationships in children of divorced families, and the literature varies on the topics discussed, this study will focus on the sibling relations aspect as one of the key characteristics in determining outcomes.

Race

A final way children may be disproportionately affected by divorce is race. One study found some major disparities in children of divorce tied to race. First, it found that approximately 40% of black children, while only 28% of white children experienced divorce. It was further concluded that when compared with whites and other minorities, black fathers are less likely to have seen or spent time with their children during the last five years (Furstenburg et al., 1983). In a more recent study, however, it surmised that in Dutch Caribbeans, who the authors stated resemble blacks in the United States, the effects of divorce are actually much less than the effects on white children (Kalmijn, 2010). A last interesting study to consider is the relationships of college students with divorced parents when specifically looking at racial group differences. In this study, it was found that both Black and Latino/Hispanic participants reported being more "attachment-related avoidant" in their own intimate relationships when compared with white participants (Lopez et al. 2010). This finding alludes to a future implication of racial differences as a result of being a child of divorce, and should continue to be researched along with other facets of race as well.

Possible Long Term Implications

Much of the research previously discussed tends to focus on the more immediate outcomes of divorce, and the long term effects are often neglected in the literature. However, there have been a few longitudinal studies that attempt to understand the enduring significance. One of the first studies like this was done by Wallerstein and Lewis. The study began in the 1970's and took place over 25 years. This revolutionary study found that "divorce is a cumulative experience of the child" (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998:380). In young adulthood, this collective experience could be seen predominantly through their views of their own potential adult relationships (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). Another study using data from the National Survey of Children sought to understand the lasting impacts of divorce on children into early adulthood. This study gathered that children of divorce were more likely to have poor relationships with parents, more behavioral problems, and were more likely to not finish high school and seek psychological help (Zill et al., 1993).

A final study that looked at the long term implications was a longitudinal study in Britain that looked at mental health in now adult children of divorce at the age of 23. This study found a mild increase in the potential for risk of a range of emotional problems. The risk increased from 8% to 11%, when comparing children who experienced divorce versus those who had not (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995). This study and the aforementioned ones infer that the impacts of divorce go far beyond childhood and carry on with children at least into early adulthood. These analyses are particularly interesting, because the subjects in these longitudinal studies are around the age of the participants in the sample of the current study. Therefore, this study may add further insight into the existing body of research on the lasting implications.

Protective Factors for Children

As much research has been done on the risk factors that may cause negative outcomes which have been previously discussed, there are also many studies that seek to understand the protective factors that may help to alleviate these negatives outcomes in children of divorce. A major focus in the literature on protective factors focuses on key relational aspects. In a recent review of the literature on risk and protective factors for children of divorce, it was found that social support acted as a mediator from negative outcomes, and further was correlated positively with the child's social functioning (Leon 2003). Though there is not one clear cut definition for social support, the medical dictionary defines it as "Help given to provide feedback, satisfy needs, and validate another's experience." It goes on to state that "Research suggests that the loss of social support is a cause of psychological disorders" (Mosby's Medical Dictionary). For the purpose of this study, social support will be thought of in this way. Social support was also found to be a protective factor in children who had siblings, because they provide an additional means of social support (Cowen, Pedro-Carroll, & Alpert-Gillis, 1990). Another study identified maintenance of positive relationships with both parents, including the non-custodial parent, following the separation as a way to mediate many of the negative affects children may have otherwise experienced (Hess & Camara, 1979). Considering the findings of these studies, it is evident that the role of social support plays a part in protecting children from negative outcomes of divorce.

A second area of research that demonstrates protective factors for children of divorce can be seen through child based interventions. There are countless programs that have been created with the intention of helping kids to reduce some of the negative impacts surrounding their parent's separation. Though there are an innumerable amount of these programs around today,

they all tend to have some main components in common including: a small group design, typically occur in school settings, and generally encompass the same strategies and objectives (Grych & Fincham 1992). The authors in this study went on to evaluate the efficacy of the *Children of Divorce Intervention Project*, which aimed to assist children in understanding and coming to terms with their feelings about the divorce and also aimed to strengthen their views of themselves and subsequently their families. The intervention did this by implementing age appropriate activities such as board games and trained professionals providing pivotal information during 12-15 in school sessions. The results of this evaluation showed children who received this intervention exhibited a number of benefits from the program such as: an increase in social activity, better compliance with rules, a decrease in anxiety, less learning problems, and better overall adjustment (Grych & Fincham 1992). With programs like this one, it is discernible the positive effects these child based programs can elicit in children of divorce.

Subjective Age

The literature previously detailed focused on aspects relevant to my original research question of understanding variation in the effects in children of divorce. The next sections will instead focus on the theme of subjective age, which was one found inductively almost unanimously in the participants in the current study. Moving forward, in a more recent field of study, researchers have been attempting to comprehend the way in which individuals perceive their subjective age in comparison with their legitimate or “chronological” age. Specifically, researchers have begun to look at the ways in which children feel they have subjectively grown up faster as a result of their experiences. Further, a few studies have also looked at the way this perception of increase in subjective age manifests itself in children of divorce. This is a topic that

has received a lot of attention since the 2000's and further, one that is pertinent to the present study.

Subjective age is a concept that has been of interest to sociologists in the recent decades. It differs from chronological age and can change as often as one feels. Researchers have attempted to explain this phenomena and have defined it as the age one perceives themselves to feel or be (Settersten and Mayer 1997). People often create their subjective age by comparing the way they feel to others who were born at the same time as them, or the same chronological age. When people create the image of their subjective age, it can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. In Johnson and Mollborn (2009), they found that while perceiving oneself to have an older subjective age may lead to an increase in acceptance of responsibility, it may also lead to a false sense of maturity that may later produce problems in adolescence. This study will further explore both the risks and benefits that come along with children perceiving themselves to have a higher subjective age as a result of parental divorce.

When thinking about subjective age in terms of this study, it is important to understand the general place subjective identity of age has within the family as a whole. Many different factors could influence a perceived increase in someone's subjective age, and research has classified a good number of these in recent years. For example, one recent study found that "stressful" family role transitions act as a component that would influence an individual to feel an increase in their subjective age. This study further articulated that turmoil within the family also accelerated a person's subjective age identity (Schafer&Shippee 2010). Another study looked at perceived age identity within different types of families and concluded that children perceived themselves as having the subjective age of an adult if they were part of a single parent or stepparent family when compared with children in tact biological families (Benson &

Johnson, 2009). A final study to observe in this regard was done by Johnson and Mollborn (2009) and concluded that certain “key” hardships in childhood, in this case, specifically in the family, led to children feeling subjectively older in early adulthood. With these findings all tied to the family structure, it is imperative to explore the implications this has for children of divorce feeling they grew up faster with regard to their subjective age.

The Narrative of Growing up Faster

One of the earliest studies done on children feeling their parent’s divorce led to an increase in their subjective age was done by Weiss in 1979. In this study, he concluded that without the two parents in the home, a lot of additional household responsibility is placed upon the child. Further, with this change in household roles, and the internalization of acting as a “junior partner,” the children in these single family homes reported feeling subjectively older and more mature (Weiss 1979). An even earlier study also concluded that subjects felt they needed to mature faster following their parents’ divorce in order to take on the more adult responsibilities now expected of them (Reinhard 1977). Later research does not stray from these initial findings. Amato (1987) gathered that children in these families had a greater sense of autonomy. However, this autonomy came with greater demands and expectations from their parents that led them to increased feelings of maturity. Almost all of these studies presented focus on a gain sense of responsibility as a result of their parent’s divorce being tied to their subjective age identity. However, it is important to investigate other reasons as to why this perceived change may occur.

Some other studies regarding an increase in children’s feeling subjectively older have attempted to understand other reasons for this outside of a heightened sense of responsibility. One study explores the ways in which the sharing of intimate details, specifically by the mother,

can impact this subjective age. It was found that with the subjection to more adult conversation of sensitive topics, children as a result feel more “adult,” and are also more likely to experience feelings of psychological distress (Hetherington, 1999). This study was one of the few that touched on the implications outside of responsibility. Little research has been done however on taking care of a parent emotionally with regard to feeling subjectively older. A more recent study done by Koerner, Kenyon, and Rankin (2006) attempts to do just that. In this study, the researchers examine the ways emotionally supporting their mother affects the children’s subjective age. They found that acting as emotional support for the mothers did not actually lead to feelings of perceiving themselves as older than their peers. However, they did find that the mother’s sharing of personal information was associated with a higher level of social involvement or dating in the adolescents. This finding is particularly interesting as it does not show a conclusive relationship between emotional support of a parent and feeling subjectively older. The current study will further investigate this link and add some new insight to the lacking area of research.

Life Course Perspective

With some research showing that children feel they “grew up faster” as a result of their parent’s divorce, it is important to examine this notion with regard to the life course perspective. An early article on life course theory saw it as something that is “a multilevel phenomenon, ranging from structured pathways through social institutions and organizations to the social trajectories of individuals and their developmental pathways” (Elder, 1994:5). By looking at this, a parallel can be seen through development and its pathways with relation to the perception of subjective age. A more recent study done by Montepare (2009) attempts to create a life span framework for subjective age. Here, the authors concluded a few things. First, an individual’s

subjective age tends to rise and fall before and at the entry into adulthood. This finding is particularly interesting in relation to the present study. She also found that subjective age may be an “alternative potential marker of development.” (Montepare, 2009). This is also a pivotal point to examine with relation to the current research. A final study looking at subjective age with reference to life course theory is the previously discussed research of Schafer and Shippee. It concluded that age identity should be looked at sociologically not only in reference to chronological age, also in ways that individuals relate to age subjectively over the life course. (Schafer & Shippee, 2010). With all of these findings, we must continue to seek information on how subjective age is developed and changed over a life course theory.

In this study, I originally sought to understand how children experience variation in the effects of their parent’s divorce. I inductively found, however, through the participant’s narratives, that their feeling of a need to “grow up faster” led to a perceived increase in subjective age. It is critical to use the life course perspective to understand the lasting impacts of the feelings of a rise in subjective age in children of divorce, rather than just focusing on the effects during the time of the divorce. This has been researched in some recent studies described above, but further is something that needs significantly more research to fully comprehend this idea of the effects of divorce over the course of a lifetime. This study attempts to bridge that gap by exploring some common factors that led children to believing their parent’s divorce subjectively made them grow up faster.

METHODS

The originally purpose of this study was to understand the variation in the way that children experience their parent’s divorce. By looking at young adult’s narratives and their perceptions of growing up faster, I inductively discovered and chose to focus on children’s

feelings of an increase in subjective age. I was able to establish rapport with participants by informing them of my positionality as a college student who has also experienced the divorce of my parents. The questions were asked in a semi structured interview style in an effort to allow the participants to elaborate and provide detail and insight into certain aspects of their parent's divorce that may have had a lasting impact on them in some manner. This method of using more of a conversational approach provided plenty of opportunities for the participant to speak freely and openly while still being optimal for obtaining the data needed to answer my research question.

Participants

In this study, the participants were students ages 18-24 currently enrolled in the University of Colorado Boulder who had experienced parental divorce before the time of the interview. I conducted a total of twenty qualitative interviews. As far as the demographics for the participants in this study, there was generally a fairly equal split between male and female interviewees (Males: 9 Females:11; see Table 1). For this demographic aspect of gender, the study intentionally attempted to find an equal number of both male and female participants as understanding the differences in gender was sociologically interesting. Though the participants were all required to be current University of Colorado Boulder students, 45% of the subjects had ultimately grown up in Colorado as well. Other participants home towns included places in Florida, New York, Arizona, California, Illinois, and a few others.

The age and grade of participants at the time of the interview featured a range from 18 year old freshmen to 23 year old, sixth year seniors. The mean age was 20.7 with the mode for year in school/class being seniors. There was also a large span of ages (2-21) in regards to the age the participant was when their parents got divorced. In this regard, there was also substantial

variation in the age of the child at the time of their parent's divorce. 15% of participants parents experienced their parent's divorce age at 5 or under, 35% of subject's parents divorced when the child was between 6-10, another 25% of the interviewee's parents got divorced when they were between 11-14, 15% were between 15-18 when their parents divorced, and finally 10% of participants were 18+ when their parents ultimately separated. It is important to consider the breakdown of ages, as past research has shown that age is generally linked to different effects experienced by children of divorce. Another significant demographic piece of information was the birth order of the subject. 35 % were the youngest, 30% fell somewhere in the middle, and 20% were the oldest sibling. Finally, 15% of participants were only children at the time of their parent's divorce.

As far as racial demographics in this study, the sample was lacking in variation, featuring primarily students who ethnically identified as White (90%). Although these statistics appear fairly homogenized, it is reflective of the CU Boulder population as a whole. The most recent statistics document the percentage of white/Caucasian Undergraduate students as about 71% as of Fall 2015 (College Portraits). Despite the fact that this study did not specifically look at the socioeconomic class of the participants, information regarding financial circumstances later presented itself as relevant in several interviews and will be discussed further in analyses. The study did ask the participants to divulge their parent's occupations, which painted a fairly accurate picture of their position in society. Approximately 80% of participants had at least one parent who held a professional or managerial job. In regard to other demographics observed, the participants also held a wide range of political views and religious beliefs. In this study, there were participants from the same family where multiple members of the same family participated

in interviews. These siblings sets featured one of two brothers, and one with three sisters, two of which were twins.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Year in School	Hometown	Siblings	Age When Parents divorced
Sam*	21	M	White	Senior	Ridgefield, CT	1 younger brother, 1 younger sister	20
Bailey*	22	F	White	Senior	Sedona, AZ	N/A	2
Hannah*	21	F	White	Senior	San Diego, CA	Four younger step siblings	9
James*	22	M	White	Senior	Dallas, Texas	One older Sister, Two younger siblings	15
Dylan*	21	M	White	Senior	Garland, Texas	Older 34 year old biological brother	10
Alex*	19	M	White	Sophomore	St Petersburg, FL	Older brother, Older sister, Younger sister	13
Austin*	23	M	White	Senior	Cincinnati, OH	Younger sister, Older half brother	13
Annie*	20	F	White	Junior	Lagrange, IL	Older sister, younger brother	11
Ryan*	22	M	White	Senior	Littleton, CO	No blood siblings- Two step sisters ,one step brother; all older	11
Danielle*	23	F	White	Senior	Boulder CO	Younger twin sisters	10
Sarah*	20	F	White	Junior	Boulder, CO	Identical twin and older sister	5
Megan*	20	F	White	Sophomore	Boulder, CO	Identical twin and older sister	5
Kendall*	20	F	Asian	Senior	Aurora, CO	2 blood brothers and 1 half brother; all younger	11
Catherine*	20	F	White	Sophomore	Minneapolis, MN	2 older brothers	16
Jessica*	21	F	White	Senior	Highlands Ranch, CO	1 older sister	17
Gabriella*	18	F	White	Freshman	Western Springs, IL	One older brother and one older sister	10
Michael*	19	M	White	Sophomore	Chappaqua, NY	Two older sisters	10
Emma*	21	F	White	Senior	Bayfield, CO	Older 39 year old half brother	21
Evan*	21	M	White	Senior	Denver, CO	Younger brother	8
Jayden*	20	M	African American/ Hispanic	Junior	Denver, CO	2 older brothers and one younger biological brother; one younger step	6

Data Collection

To collect data from the participants in this study, I used multiple recruitment strategies to obtain a sufficient number of participants. Primarily, I used snowball sampling to reach participants that I did not know directly, but rather secondhand-ly through friends or acquaintances. This method enabled me to obtain the majority of participants used in the study (70%). Additionally, when this method seemed to be exhausted, I also posted a pre-approved message on both Facebook, and in the form of a paper flyer on spaces across campus (See Appendix A). In this memo, it was made clear that to be a participant that it was required the interested party must be a current CU student age 18-24 who has experienced the divorce of their

¹ * indicates the use of pseudonyms for participant's names.

parents. My friends on Facebook were also able to share the post on their own Facebook pages with my original message to help gain a larger and more diverse sample. At the bottom of both the online posts and flyer, my contact information was given to the potential participant to contact me if they wanted to participate. This alternative method also helped me to gain a number of subjects (30%) for my sample, and helped me to reach a complete data set.

All the data collected was gathered directly from the personal interviews held with the 20 participants between the months of September 2017 and January 2018. As I was the main researcher on this project, I was therefore the one to carry out all twenty interviews. The interviews ranged in length from around 35 minutes to nearly an hour and a half. After a participant expressed their interest in partaking in an in-depth interview, a time would be determined that was convenient for both parties to meet. The interviews were held in a place of the individual's choosing in an effort to help the participant feel relaxed and create a laid-back environment where the interviewee felt comfortable sharing their narrative. The typical setting usually was a study room in the CU Boulder library, or a coffee shop of the participant's choosing. Before each interview began, the participant was presented with a detailed consent form that outlined the purpose of the study and informed them of their rights during the study (See Appendix B). After the participant had fully read and signed the consent form, I would then ask them for additional consent to record the interview on my iPhone.

Following the consent by the interviewee, I would begin the interview by asking the participant for all of their basic demographic information which I recorded in Excel on my laptop. From there, I began the actual interview questions only after reminding them in an introductory phrase that there were no time constraints on the interview and that all information they shared would remain completely confidential. As the participant answered the interview

questions, I would also take notes by hand. I chose to focus on certain aspects of the subject's answers that were revealing themselves to be possible commonalities amongst participants.

The style of the interview was semi-structured, featuring questions that were pre-scripted in a universal interview guide (See Appendix C). The questions that I asked were comprehensive and further strived to help answer my main research question of what factors create variance in the way children experience their parents' divorce. These main questions, although the same for each subject, allowed for the participant to answer in whatever way he or she interpreted the question. These questions although phrased the same way in each interview elicited widely varying answers depending on the way the participant tried to understand what I was asking. Some participants would answer simple questions in an in-depth fashion while others would speak briefly and then resort to an unrelated tangent that came to mind. From the main interview guide questions asked, I would often probe the interviewee with additional questions that pertained to something they previously spoke about that I found particularly interesting or needed more information on. These probe questions were occasionally ones from a pre-written script, but often emerged more so out of spontaneous conversation. The interviews typically began with the vague question of "Tell me the story of your parent's divorce," and progressed into more in depth questions such as "How do you think your parent's divorce has affected the course of your life?" Despite the fact each question was looking to gain insight to a certain aspect of the participant's experience of their parent's divorce; the way the participant answered implied certain facets that were particularly important to them. This diversity in answering produced many interesting results and led to many of the observations discussed in the main themes of this research.

Analysis

Following the completion of my twenty interviews, each of them were professionally and individually transcribed. Once complete, I began to manually code all of the data. I would read through each transcription of the interview, and manually code potential themes and commonalities amongst the participants. Many of these ideas began to present themselves in the initial stages of the interviews, however it was important to make sure these themes would still be prominent after the collection period was finalized. I also re-analyzed the memos I created post-interview for each participant to remember the demeanor of the participant and any other moments that could not be discovered through a transcribed document. In other instances, the themes appeared later in the research process when re-reading participant's interviews transcriptions and coming to new conclusions. I specifically sought to understand themes that were sociologically interesting such as ones that pertained to factors such as race, class, and gender; but found many other compelling ones along the way as well. Though not all themes from the study could be discussed at length, I chose to focus on the ones that were most socially relevant to the subjective narrative participants told regarding feelings of growing up faster including the role of the parent, the role of the sibling, and the use of divorce as a learning experience. It is important to note that with these findings to be presented, the experiences are all subjective narratives of the participants, and not necessarily objective truths.

RESULTS

Overview

Overwhelmingly throughout my study, participants reported that in some manner they believed the divorce accelerated their process of growing up. Though this theme manifested itself in many different forms later to be discussed, it was one that was unanimous across subjects. This idea is not new. Rather, it that has been found to be true in past research as well. As

previously discussed in the literature review, past studies suggest that children who experience the divorce of their parents do in fact grow up a little faster. Further, Weiss went on to state that those children in single parent households do so because they often times take on the role of “junior partners” as far as household responsibilities (Weiss 1979). This was something that I saw frequently in my own research in the sense that when participants stated how they had to grow up faster, it was often tied to a feeling of increased or gained responsibility in some light. Whether the participants felt that they had took on entirely new responsibilities due to the divorce, or just saw an increase in the ones they held previously, it was evident that as a result of the separation the subjects were taking on more adult duties.

It is interesting to note, however, that this change was not one that was always spoke about in a negative light. Though taking on additional responsibilities as a child may be difficult, I also found it to be a source of resilience expressed in many of the subjects. Several participants even attributed their childhood adversity to the reason they are now strong and independent young adults. Past literature identifies responsibility as a key characteristic in becoming an adult. Research also indicates that those participants who felt they grew up faster may have gained this perspective because of the additional post-divorce responsibility, moving them into an early adulthood. Through the participants’ narratives in this study, it was revealed that these newfound responsibilities could take many forms, and perhaps even more so, that certain factors would affect the level of responsibilities that a child must take on.

When thinking about the participants in this study who exemplified all of the themes regarding growing up faster that I was finding in the most concrete way, I decided to use one participant in particular as a case study to really help to illustrate the main findings. Sarah is a twenty-year-old white female born and raised in a liberal medium sized city, whose parents

divorced when she was six years old. She grew up with two sisters, one older sister (23) and also an identical twin sister. Although she was only five years old at the time of her parent's separation, she expressed many ways in which she felt she grew up faster due to the divorce. When prompted with the question of how she feels about the divorce present day, she initially expressed some frustrations she has held onto, but went on to say,

At the same time having gone through a divorce, we grew up really fast, and I'm okay with that because I would rather be more real about everything that's going on around me and more aware of people's feelings, more aware of how a relationship can affect your entire life in such an intense way and everyone around it.

This quote helps to illustrate that although she felt the need to grow up at a very young age, that she believes the experience was beneficial in the long run for her development into a young adult.

When looking at the different factors in which Sarah described as associated with her accelerated maturation, she was able to attribute it to three key components. These three elements were also found in the of majority participants, however I will initially convey them in relation to Sarah's example. First, there is the seemingly obvious role of the parent. In Sarah's case, her mother tried to hide information regarding the divorce from her in an attempt to preserve her innocence and perhaps try to prevent the feeling that she needed to grow up faster. "My parents were pretty guarding. They would try to protect us." Though her parents may have seen this as protecting their children, it actually prompted her to grow up faster in an effort to understand and make sense of what was going on without directly being told the information. Five other main aspects of the role of the parent influencing their children to grow up faster also

presented themselves throughout the interviewee's responses including: being the parents emotional support, feeling financially responsible for the parent, playing the role of the mediator/messenger, the idea of parents speaking negatively about their ex-partner to the child, and feeling the need to be a "better kid" for the sake of their parents.

The next factor that played a role in Sarah having to grow up quicker than normal was her relationship with her twin sibling. Typically, I found a positive relationship with birth order and growing up the fastest in the sense that it was typically the oldest sibling taking on the most responsibility. However, in this specific case of twins, Sarah felt the obligation to assume the role of the older sibling. When asked if she had felt that her role in the family changed post-divorce, she responded with,

It's probably similar but it's weird because I've always felt like I was Megan's older sister, my twin's older sister. I always felt like I was kind of taking care of her throughout everything so maybe that changed... Like I said she wouldn't really stand up for things. I think I had to get stronger I had to be able to talk because I didn't want to live like that -There's certain things I just didn't want to experience. I became an older sister because she was upset, and I would speak up like it was me too.

Though Sarah was not the oldest sibling, and in this case would be an exception to the typical finding with birth order, she still felt as though it was her job to be her sister's voice and almost protect her from the divorce in the same way in which their mother tried to do for them. The other three elements regarding the role of the sibling in conjunction with growing up faster include the "typical" birth order cases, chronological age facilitating which siblings truly "understand" things, and the part that gender plays.

Finally, a third factor tied to growing up faster as a child of divorce can be seen through many subject's use of divorce as a learning experience leading to changes in themselves and their outlooks. With Sarah being exposed to such a traumatic event at the young age of five, it is safe to assume it will have some form of lasting effect on the child, be that positive or negative. In Sarah's case, she felt that it positively influenced her with respect to gaining a lifelong strength. "I had to overcome a lot in the divorce towards me being able to speak up and being able to be honest about what I wanted and needed. I think that's really helped me in growing up because I'm a lot better at it. I think if I hadn't gone through the divorce, I'd likely continue just pleasing everyone around me, even if it made me unhappy." From this quote, it is evident that Sarah was able to take something good out of the experience of being pushed to grow up faster, specifically recognizing a positive internal change in herself. The additional three ways in which participants in this study grew up faster by using their parent's separation as a learning experience, that will be later discussed, include: internal personal changes, knowing what they want for themselves now, and knowing what they want for their future.

The three main contributing factors previously listed that played a role in the expedited growing up process will be discussed further in detail to better illustrate the impact of divorce on a child. Through understanding Sarah's case study example, we can see the ways in which these three elements interact, and how they influence each subject's personal narrative revolving around their own experience of growing up faster following their parent's divorce. As a result of the role the parent and the siblings play in the growing up process, it was shown that it will have an influence on the ways in which a child uses the divorce as a learning experience, and further what they will carry on with them as a lifelong consequence. Here, I have drawn from the story of one person to show how it illustrates the ways in which she grew up faster as a result of her

parent's divorce. Throughout the rest of this paper, I will do the same for the all other participants as well.

The role of the Parent: Who's really the "adult" here?

The first major aspect of the participant's experience of their parent's divorce surrounds the role of the parent. Changes to a parent child relationship, where the child is expected to take on a more adult role, can be one of the largest and perhaps most detrimental implications of a child growing up prematurely due to his or her parents' divorce. Whether it be physically, emotionally, or financially, children of divorce often feel the burden of taking care of one or even both of their parents in some form. In this section, I will illustrate the six different ways in which parents play a part in their child's fast-moving transition into adulthood.

"Don't Cry, Mom": Children Being their Parent's Emotional Support

Often times with divorce, there comes an abrupt shift in responsibilities for both the parents and children. With children often splitting custody between parents, miscommunication frequently leads to a disconnect of who's in charge of what aspects of the child's life. In my study however, a large portion of participants actually believed that they were the one who was liable for their parent's well-being, even to the point of putting their parent's needs ahead of their own. For example, when asked if her role in the family changed post-divorce, Hannah, a 21-year-old upper middle class white female, replied with

I felt so responsible for my mom. I felt like I was taking care of her and had to make sure she was happy all the time. I remember being like "Don't cry, Mom." Like patting her back, getting her tissues. I felt my emotions, my feelings had to be put on hold the entire time while my mom was upset. I was the stronger one when I was the daughter.

Through this, it is apparent that Hannah took on the role of being her mom's emotional support system. When her parents got divorced she was only 9 years old. At nine, she experienced a role reversal when she became responsible for the emotional well-being of her mother. Assuming this responsibility at such a young age certainly has an effect on the way a child carries themselves. Hannah felt that she had to put aside her own feelings to care for her mother, which is something that is not typically the job of a small child. To do this, Hannah was unknowingly giving up a piece of her childhood and making her way into early adulthood. Rather than telling her mom to seek help elsewhere, she accepted this role and began to mature more quickly than what is typically expected of a child to be there for her mother. She felt that especially as an only child, if she did not take on this responsibility, that no one else would. So, by default, she accepted this daunting role as her own harsh reality as a part of growing up faster to take care of her mother.

Another participant, Kendall, a 20-year-old Asian female, expressed a similar sentiment; however in reference to her father saying, "I felt like I had to take care of my dad just because he was at such a low point in his life, where he was like 'love isn't real, the person I committed to did this to me.' He just felt super betrayed. I felt like I had to lift him up. Even today I feel I still need to lift him up." Kendall's mother had cheated on her father, which was the primary reason her parents ultimately divorced. And because he felt that sense of betrayal so harshly, Kendall felt it was her duty to do something about it; even though she was only 11 at the time and not the culprit who caused him to feel that. She took on the responsibility that a spouse typically would of raising their partners spirits and ensuring their happiness.

Here, it is interesting to look at the way in which gender and culture play an intersecting role in Kendall's behavior. Kendall was a young girl who was raised in a traditional Asian family

where she consistently spoke about the values of the women in the family primarily as caretakers or nurturers. With her mother leaving, she felt that it was suddenly her job as the sole women in the household to take care of her father emotionally. She grew up to “fit the shoes” of this new role she felt obligated to take on in an effort to do what she felt was expected of her as an Asian woman. In the last part of her quote on this matter, she makes it clear that she felt this way through the divorce and continuing into the future, as a lasting effect of the divorce that persists to this day.

In both of these participant’s cases, the rate in which they grew up was hastened because they were constantly worried about their parent’s emotional state rather than being able to just be a kid. This held many lasting implications for the child’s life including possibly neglecting their own emotional needs, having to comprehend adult situations at a younger age, and struggling to learn how to be an emotional support system for the person who typically should be doing so for them. Though both the participant’s came from female participants, it is not to say that this didn’t happen in male participant’s experiences as well. However, it appeared through the data that the females in this study generally touched more on feeling as though they were responsible for a parent’s emotional well-being, whereas male participants generally felt more responsible for their parent’s in other regards, specifically financially, as will be discussed in the following section. This could be attributed to the gender norms placed on inhabitants of society from a young age, which is another theme that will be explored further in regards to the role of gender in sibling relations. These gender norms primarily revolved around the tradition of the male acting as the financial breadwinner, whereas females are in turn expected to take care of the family emotionally. In the next section, I will discuss the ways in which participants felt financially responsible for their parent following their parent’s separation.

Finances: Feeling the need to be Frugal

Feeling the innate obligation to be a parent's emotional support takes enough of a toll on a child's development, however many of my participants reported feeling perhaps an even more influential constraint in regards to finances. When a couple seeks a divorce, finances usually always play a key role one way or another. In some cases, financial instability/differences can be the main reason as to why a couple ultimately chooses to separate. Whereas in other instances, money can play a big role in the court process concerning who pays what for child support and alimony- not to mention the huge sums of money the parents may be paying in legal or therapy fees. In my study however, I found an interesting link between children actually feeling financially accountable for their parent or parents to some extent.

As a child in America, traditionally your parents are responsible for you financially until you reach the age of 18 and are legally considered an adult. Of course, there is some variation in this based on things such as parent's salaries, the specific parent child relationship, and countless other situational factors. When a child goes from having the financial support of two parents, down to one, who may not have a steady income, it is seen as an incredibly stressful time for everyone involved. It became apparent in my study that many participants felt this weight fell on their shoulders.

In the example of Ryan, a 23 year old male who came from a lower socio economic class than most of the participants, his parents divorced when he was only 11 years old. Ryan's feeling of needing to help out manifested itself through the heightened awareness of his mother's financial struggles and through his efforts to reduce her financial stress in whatever way he possibly could. When I asked Ryan if anything had changed his position in his family post-divorce, he responded with,

I felt both my mom and my dad struggle financially after the divorce, so I felt like if there was any role that I had to take on it was just don't give my mom a hard time if I'm not getting a video game or getting a new football or I don't know, something like that. I just had to go with it, I understood that my mom was struggling financially, and she was doing everything that she could to make sure I was happy as a kid.

Ryan had a very close relationship with his mother following his parent's separation, whereas not the same could be same for his father due to his infidelity and lack of being emotionally available to him as a parent. So even though at first, he mentioned that he saw both of his parents struggle financially, it seemed as though he only was concerned for his mom's adversities in this situation. Ryan would give up the opportunity to obtain or engage in simple pleasures a child normally would in an effort to try to help his mother's financial affairs. Something that prior to the divorce wouldn't have been a thought to ask for like a new football suddenly became a constant thought of distress in Ryan's young mind. Without another male figure in the house to provide for his mother, he took the necessary steps an 11-year-old could to try to protect his mom from enduring any more economic hardship. Through this example it is evident the implications financial difficulties can have on a child and their experience of needing to help with a parent's circumstances in a very grown up manner.

In Ryan's case though, he had a positive experience with his step father, who later came into the picture and helped to alleviate some of his feelings of financial burden. When asked about whether he felt the impacts of the divorce on him have increased or decreased, he answered decreased because of the presence of his step-dad and further stated,

I think that my stepdad coming into my life a few years after was something that maybe took away some of the negative effects of the divorce... because we were a little bit more financially stable after he came into the mix, so that was nice knowing that I didn't have to order the cheapest thing on the dinner menu.

When Ryan's step dad entered his life, he expressed it was a rough adjustment at first, but also, that it gave him back a piece of his childhood in a sense. He felt that he didn't have to be as concerned about financial matters with a second 'parent figure' back in the picture, and that it raised their level of financial stability enough to allow him to ask for certain things he may have been hesitant too before. Essentially, Ryan's step father acted as a protector from him feeling like he needed to grow up quickly to help his mom out financially. However, it is still important to note that prior to this time, that Ryan still unmistakably felt the need to grow up faster and try to help out financially in any way he could as a young child.

A more tangible example of a way in which participants felt they grew up to take on some form of financial responsibility presented itself in the way that Michael, and some of the other participants spoke about their own imminent financial futures. This was typically found in the children of families who came from higher socioeconomic classes prior to the divorce, who felt that they moved down the ladder ultimately as a result of it. Michael was considered to be an upper class white male when his parents were together, with his dad working in the stock market world and earning a fairly high income. His mother, however, was a stay at home mom before the split, and it was only following the divorce she got a job to earn enough to be able to support her three kids. Michael recognized this change and saw it as something that would have a lasting impact on his own views of finances carrying on into his future. When thinking about his change in outlooks attributed to the divorce, he had this to say, "I feel I didn't really realize that as a kid,

but now, if I was in the position where I had a very wealthy family, it's almost not as much of a worry to figure things out as soon as possible. Now I need to finish college and I need to get a good job. I need to get myself settled." I then proceeded to ask if he felt like he had to be more responsible and he responded with, "Yes, for myself because there's not a safety net to fall back on."

Michael here realizes that because of his family's digression in their socioeconomic class, that he gained a sense of responsibility financially that would stick with him far longer than just through the time of the divorce. Though Michael states that he didn't feel this responsibility as a child at the time of the divorce when he was only 10, it is something that still ultimately led to him growing up faster through his young adolescent years. This economic strain that was thrust upon his mother post-divorce is what ultimately produced his mentality of not having a financial safety net as he would have had his parents remained married, and further motivated him to want full financial security for himself.

In Michael's case, we can also clearly see the different expectations when it comes to finances between he and his older sister. At another point in our interview, Michael spoke about the unfairness of his mother being willing to buy his sister a car after she completes college in May and how he was instead expected to buy and maintain his own car with no financial help from his mother. Through this, it appears his mother is almost perpetuating the gender stereotype by expecting her son to be able to take care of himself financially into the future, while still being complacent with helping his sister financially. In any case though, we can see the implications of Michael feeling strained financially following his parent's divorce, and further the role that his gender ultimately played in him being the one to take on this burden.

As previously stated in the last section, the girls were more likely to take on the emotional support role, while the boys reported feeling more financially responsible for their parent. Through the first two examples given, we see this to be true. However, in the instance of our case study Sarah, she also spoke about the financial burden she took on following her parent's divorce. Her mother had always worked a lower income type job, and without the joint income of her father any longer as an option, Sarah has felt the need to step up financially to help her mother. When asking about the specific responsibilities she felt she gained as a result of her parent's divorce, she immediately thought about the question in terms of financial responsibility responding with, "I got a job in high school to pay for a good chunk of the activity I was doing and things like that because I didn't want to ask my dad. I knew my dad had the money to help us out, but I didn't want to ask."

Here, we see a much more tangible way of growing up faster as a result of feeling accountable financially for a parent. Similarly, to the case of Ryan, Sarah felt guilty to ask her mother for money because she knew that they were already struggling financially. Sarah took it a step further though by saying that she took the matter of her financial status into her own hands by getting a job to pay for her own activities in an effort to be less financially burdensome for her mother. This case of Sarah is interesting to note because she was raised by a single mother with two other female siblings; in other words, there was no male figure truly involved in their financial life. Due to this, it is hard to state that had there been a male influence in the picture, if Sarah would have still felt this pressure to do so, or if it would have then instead fallen to the responsibility of said male. Nevertheless, it is evident that when children feel liable for improving or aiding their parent's finances in some form, that it makes them more grown up than other children their age who do not share this concern. In the section to follow, I will consider

the ways in which a child taking on the role of a mediator or messenger influences the process of growing up faster.

The “Glue” between the Two: Children Acting as the Mediator

Not only did many participants report taking on the role of being emotionally or financially responsible for their parent, but a good number also felt they took on a role of the mediator as well. In many cases, divorce can be an uncivil and messy ordeal. Parents are often left not wanting to speak to their ex-partner because of ill feelings they may hold toward them for one reason or another. The role of a mediator or messenger requires a sophisticated interaction that many grown adults are not even capable of doing well themselves. This illustrates how a child grows up prematurely to accept this responsibility. So, whether it be a simpler thing such as the need to change a weekend where one parent had the child, or a horrific argument needing to be settled: the children were often put in the place where they were expected to be the one to solve these complex in nature issues.

In Gabriella’s situation, not only was she the emotional support her parents needed, but on top of that role, she also took on another;

My parents would use me as basically a messenger. They would tell me how angry they were with the other parent, how they hated them... Then it just got completely worse. My parents would start saying ‘what are they saying about me,’ and ‘what’s going on on their side’? I would just feel stuck, because I would always feel like I was the one getting blamed for not telling them things even though I was the one that was trying to protect the both of them and take care of both of them and their feelings.

Gabriella was the youngest participant in my sample, as an 18 year old freshman. Her parents began the process of separating when she was merely 10 years old. Though she was only a small child at the time; she was unwillingly asked to take on a very adult obligation. She felt the pressure to be the “peacemaker” between her parents in all definitions of the word. At 10, she was expected to be able to decipher what types of things were absolutely necessary to fill the other parent in on while also trying to conceal certain aspects in order to shield her parents from information that she perceived to be harmful. She felt personally responsible for causing problems between her parents if she wasn’t able to successfully act as their messenger, though this was truly to no fault of her own. Her parents didn’t formally allow her to take on this responsibility, but almost encouraged her to do so. As a result, they forced her to grow up too quickly and perceive an increase in her subjective age. Later in our interview, she even went on to say that she felt her parents had actually wanted her to grow up faster. As a young and malleable child, it is assumed that your parents have your best interest at heart, and that you should do as they ask without putting up a fight; which is exactly what Gabriella did. Despite this, it is evident the negative role that her parents played in the accelerated transition from child to adult.

Though taking on this burden is not a pleasant experience by any means, it is one that was shared across many interviewees. In the instance of Bailey, she was only two years old when her parents got divorced, but that didn’t prevent her from taking on more grown up capacities. Rather, it only delayed the progression slightly. She expressed her involvement as a mediator as almost a “coming of age” role in a sense stating, “I feel like I was very much the messenger between my parents once I came to a certain age. I would probably say from seven or older, maybe even six. I felt like a lot of the time I needed to be the glue between them... I just felt I

was always back and forth trying to ease their relationship with each other without them actually talking about it.”

Bailey said this in such a nonchalant way, as though she believed this was something that was normal for a girl her age. She truly thought that being the one to speak to her parent on behalf of the other one was just something that “kids did.” She felt it was her responsibility to fix the ever-present problems that resided between her parents, and thought that she had failed in some way if she was not able to do so. However, it is evident that this is not something that is traditional nor healthy for a child’s development, and further something that she has carried with her over the years. When later asked what effect she believes that her parent’s divorce had on the course of her life, her response reflected the value that was instilled in her at a young age as the mediator. She attributed this expectation that was thrust upon her as to why she still feels the need to fix other’s shaky relationships.

The gendered nature of this finding was one that was much more prevalent in females than males, as seen through both the primary examples being females. Similarly to taking on the role of being a parent’s emotional support, being the mediator or the one to settle disputes is typically more associated with females than males. This could be because of the general belief that females are superior communicators, and therefore should be the one in this role primarily reliant on using communication to problem solve. That being said, it was certainly something that a few male participants touched on as well, perhaps just not stressing it as greatly as the females did in relation to their feelings of accelerated maturation.

In both the cases of Gabriella and Bailey, it is indisputable that by their parents coercing them into playing a more hands on role in the divorce process, it put them on a much quicker and direct route to adulthood. The skill of resolving tensions between adults is not one that a small

child is typically supposed to have developed by then. However, because they felt personally responsible for the preservation of their parents' relationship, both participants reacted in ways not typically expected of a child at their age. Additionally, due to the pressure they face in childhood, children of divorce may also carry the feeling of needing to fix things or ease strained relationships between people with them far into adulthood; and perhaps even something they continue to do for a lifetime.

Parent Propaganda: How do I know who's telling the truth?

As previously discussed, participants in my study often felt as though they were the ones in charge of keeping the peace between their parents; but what happens when all one parent does is spew hatred or falsifications about their ex-partner? A reoccurring belief shared by many participants brought to the forefront the notion of "parent propaganda." This concept is one that is familiar to many children of divorce, and essentially entails the bad mouthing of the "other" parent either directly or indirectly to the shared child. Parents do this for countless reasons some of which include trying to get the child to side with them in order to gain custody, or simply harvesting negative emotions toward their past spouse and wrongly expressing them to their child. From a child's perspective, this required him or her to "grow up," in order to be able to discern what things they were being told were true and which were gross exaggerations. This further prompted them to form their own opinions from a very young age. One thing about parent pollution is clear; that it has an effect on the accelerated development of a child's maturation and feelings of an increase in their subjective age.

As human beings, when we are upset or feeling resentful, we naturally want to share our frustrations with others. Though parents know that it is inherently wrong to do this with their own child concerning their other parent, the results of this study show that it happens far more

often that it should. When this does happen, it is ultimately up to that child to try to interpret what they understand as their own truth about each parent. In one participant, Danielle, who was the oldest sibling of the three sisters I interviewed, she alluded to the struggle of being young and not really knowing what to think about one of her parents because of how severely they were criticized and belittled by the other. She expressed this moral dilemma by stating “I think at first I had like a really tainted vision of my dad. It took a lot of time to sort that out and to sort what my own opinions were.”

Danielle became very close with her mother when her parents separated, primarily attributed to the fact that her twin sisters had each other. Her mom began to treat her more like a typical girlfriend from a young age, and with that came the long emotionally driven conversations and natural slamming of her ex-partner, only in this case the person whom she was badmouthing was her “girlfriend’s” father. Danielle truly felt that her mother exposed her to so many negative aspects regarding her father, that she wasn’t able to form an independent impression of him. The use of the word “tainted,” in her dialogue suggests that the nature of the things which were being revealed to her were very biased toward her father and also may not have been completely reliable due to the emotional nature of the conversation. As a child, this is incredibly difficult to understand and work through as children are not fully developed and therefore deemed incapable of making their own rational decisions. However, Danielle did not have a choice in the matter. She was driven into early adulthood as she had to decipher her own impressions, and as she stated, “sort out what her own opinions of him were.” To do this, she had to be able to keep certain things her parents would tell her in perspective, and truly reflect on what she felt to be true about both her parents from the short time she has known them. She had to use advanced reasoning and judgement far beyond what is typically expected of a 10-year-old

to come to these beliefs about her parents, while still maintaining an open mind to a certain degree. Needless to say, the idea of a parent speaking negatively about their ex-partner to a child requires many skills beyond a child's years, and therefore demands them to grow up prematurely in order to come to their own thoughts regarding their parents.

In the case of Danielle though, this practice of parental bad mouthing was not one sided. Not only was Danielle subjected to the tainting of her father's image, she was also hearing degrading details about her mother as well. During her parent's court battle, in a vicious attempt to gain custody of his children, Danielle vividly remembers this scene with her father, "He was saying really degrading things, like there was some comment about McDonald's- like my mom should just work at McDonalds. Something along those lines and telling my mom that she wasn't worth anything because she didn't have an education."

Though this quote may seem extreme, it is one that was consequential enough to stick with Danielle all these years later. Even after hearing these horrific things regarding her mother, Danielle never mentioned that it affected her image of her mom. She was always able to maintain a very close relationship with her, regardless of the negative propaganda she was being exposed to surrounding her mother's lack of skills and higher education. Danielle learned to refine and utilize advance reasoning, beyond that of a typical 10-year old. She developed a unique relationship with her mother, keeping in perspective the negativity shared by her father. This seemed to be easier for her to do with mother compared to her father. This is likely due to the fact that prior to the divorce, she spent more time with her mother while her younger twin sisters spent more time with their father. Aside from that established pre-divorce relationship, it may also be attributed to the fact that she relates to her mom on a more personal level and feels more empathetic toward her because of their shared gender. Regardless of the reason, it is

interesting to recognize the different ways in which this aspect of the divorce affected her and her relationships, and ultimately sent her on a trajectory into early adulthood.

Again, when thinking about this finding in terms of gender, it was one that was more prevalent in female participants than the males in this study. When analyzing the data, it became clear that among male participants this was not something that any of them really spoke to. Rather, the males focused much more on the next theme I will present of parents hiding information. This is particularly interesting, because it could mean that the parents were generally attempting to use parent propaganda more on females than males. It could further signify that the parents of the children in this study believed that their daughters were more easily able to be manipulated than their sons.

In this section though there were many participants who exemplified this theme, I chose to only use the more extreme example of Danielle. Danielle gave rich insight as she provided details of the ways both parents partook in the practice of parent propaganda. I felt it was most interesting to look at her dual example. In the next section, I will address the ways in which parents tried to protect their children from growing up too quickly by hiding information. It is not to say, however, that these two different means of sharing information with the children are always mutually exclusive. In this study though, it was found that it wasn't a common theme for participant's parents to practice both.

Hiding Information: Protecting or Neglecting?

Throughout the interview process, another theme regarding the information children received from their parents emerged; this time instead of being fed disinformation about a parent, they were being partially or even entirely left in the dark. Many participants felt as though their parents were intentionally keeping information from them for one reason or another. As time

went on however, it seemed as though there was generally one primary reason for parents doing this- to keep their children from feeling the demand to grow up faster and attempt to preserve what they could of their childhood. This intentional withholding of certain details about the parent's divorce had a varying effect on my participants. Some participants felt as though it actually made them grow up faster because they felt that it was their job to fill in the gaps and get to the bottom of things. This appeared to be similar to the task of children attempting to decipher the "parental propaganda." Having said that, some participants felt the opposite and actually appreciated their parent's attempts to preserve their innocence. For example, in the case of Jayden* he felt that his parents did so with his best intentions truly in mind. When asked if his parents had given him enough, too little, or too much information regarding the divorce, he answered:

I think enough. I don't think that's something you should put on children. I just think that's how you should do it. If anything you're their parents, you are supposed to protect them at the cost of other stuff. I was able to enjoy my childhood where other people who didn't have that buffer from other things going on around them. It's not necessarily good to be in a bubble, but like sometimes it's nice to be coddled about things until you're ready or mature enough.

Clearly, Jayden sees his parents concealing certain specifics as beneficial. Jayden was only six when his parents divorced, and because he was so young, he feels as though his parents did him a favor by keeping these pieces of information from him. Jayden felt it was his parent's duty to protect him from this harmful information and shield him from the real problems that may be going on behind closed doors. He felt that his parents were actually gifting him his childhood rather than stealing it away unlike other children that may have been in a similar

situation. Though he does recognize that it may not be healthy to live “in a bubble” and be sheltered from our problems, he counters by explaining that being babied may be exactly what needs to be done until the child is mature enough to understand. However, it is interesting to note that even though his parents kept information from him in an effort to prevent his accelerated maturation, that he ultimately still felt that he grew up faster because of the divorce. Jayden informed me that by the time he was 10, he and his three brothers were living full time with his mother. When asked how he felt about the divorce looking back, he replied “I think it’s for the best outcome, having a single parent you do have to grow up and learn some of these other things faster which I think helped me in the long run.” Reading this quote, it is interesting to see that although his parents tried to hinder his accelerated maturation by leaving him out of the divorce conversations, it ultimately happened regardless because he grew up with a single parent.

Being a better child

A final way the role of the parent has an effect on a child’s accelerated introduction to adulthood comes in the form of the child feeling the need to in some way become a “better child” for their parent’s sake. Typically, one would think that this would be reversed, in the sense that the newly separated parent feels compelled to be a better parent to their child in an effort to shield them from negative impacts of the divorce. Yet in my research, I discovered a recurring theme of the opposite pattern. Whether it be simply talking to their parents more and acting as a person they can vent to, or even more extreme situations like refusing to see an opposing parent in an act of loyalty to the other- it was apparent that children would go to significant measures to grow up in order to make their parent happy.

For example, Emma is a 21-year-old upper middle-class female whose parents only recently divorced within the last year. Therefore, it is something that she is certainly still going

through at the moment. Though her interview could not provide much information about the long-term effects or future consequences of the divorce, it was able to provide insight on how the divorce sparked a change in her relationship with her parents in a seemingly good way. As said, with Emma being 21 years old and away at her last year of college when her parents divorced, she was not directly affected in many ways. However, when asked whether she felt her role had changed in the short time since the divorce, she discussed how their separation has made her want to improve herself as a daughter to be there for her parents. At first she simply answered, “Just a hyperawareness of being a better daughter too.” Then, when asked what she meant by this she replied with, “I’m calling them a lot. I’m trying to be more inclusive of things with them, actually sharing things with them, maybe even a little confiding in them. Just trying to get them to not put up a barrier and talking to me about how their feeling.”

Though Emma was surely hurting too as a consequence of the divorce, she still took it upon herself to try to become a better daughter and strengthen that bond with each individual parent, rather than building on the one she had when they were together. She expressed how she felt the need to be there for her parents and act as a better daughter in an effort to help them on their own roads to recovery. Though Emma is already by definition grown up, this passage still demonstrates that she grew up faster in the sense of adjusting very quickly by deciding she wanted to be a better child and take on this new role of supporting her parents by doing all that she could to be a “better daughter.”

In the case of, Michael, a 19-year-old male, the feeling of needing to be a better child to one of his parents was a bit more drastic. Michael was one of three children, who when his parents got divorced spent most of his time primarily with his mother. Due to the painful and vindictive acts he later learned that his father committed against his mother, his mother would

take personal offense when Michael would spend time with him. When asking him how he saw his relationship change with his mother following the divorce, he recalled, “There were a couple years where my mom would always be mad at me, because I would still want to do things with my dad...He could take away a lot from her by making the divorce process messy, but she couldn’t really take anything from him except for us. If that makes sense, it’s like we were a bargaining token, I guess.” Following this, he even went as far to say that when he would come back with his sister from these outings with his father, that his mom would be crying and angry at them for enabling their alcoholic father.

She would give us a speech about how we can't keep doing that, with what he does to her. Like it’s unfair almost to give him the ability to see his kids.... For a while I thought this [his mother not wanting him or his sisters to spend time with his father] was unfair. Then as I got older I realized that it [the situation with how poorly his father treated his mother] was a little messed up, especially the worse it got. That’s why I haven’t seen him recently.

Through re-reading these excerpts from my conversation with Michael, it is clear that he made the deliberate decision to stop spending time with his father in an attempt to appease his mother. Though Michael and his father did not have the greatest relationship to begin with, he was still originally willing to see his father over dinners or other casual events with one of his siblings. However, when he got older and came to realize just how much of a damaging impact his actions were having on his mother, he elected to no longer see his father. Michael made the decision to be a better son for his mom who raised him. He loves his mother and appreciates all that she has done for him up to this point and discerned this as a reason to want to become a better son to her. At the same time though, this came at the expense of being a worse son to his

father. Michael was willing to give up any chance at a lasting relationship with his father so he could make his mother happy. Even though he recognized that this was something that seemed unfair at first, he later rationalized it because of how “bad” things became. This takes a great amount of maturity to be able to come to a conclusion that carries extensive lasting effects. Therefore, in this case, one can see how Michael was growing up faster due to external pressures he faced from his mom to ultimately be a better son to her.

In this section, I outlined six ways a parent’s role plays a large part as to whether a child matures more quickly as a result of divorce. Acting as a parent’s emotional or financial support in some manner puts a child in the traditional position of a spouse and contributes to he or she taking on significantly more responsibilities. Perhaps even more so, when children are forced to become the mediator, they must try to determine what information they should or should not pass along in an effort to keep the peace between both parties. Parents can also play a big part in the ways in a child’s understanding of details surrounding the divorce by either partaking in “parent pollution,” or hiding information from them altogether. Both of these options lead to an expedited journey to adulthood because the child is forced to come to conclusions on their own at a young age. Finally, children felt pressured to grow up faster and become a “better child” for their parent to make their transition easier, often times not thinking about their own. In the next section, I will discuss the ways in which the role of the sibling has an effect on children growing up faster by virtue of their parent’s divorce.

The Role of the Sibling

The next influence that plays a major part in how children experience their parents’ divorce is that of the sibling. In this study, 16 out of the 20 participants had biological siblings with whom they shared the experience of their parents’ divorce. A single participant had

biological siblings and additionally a half-brother, another had 3 biological siblings prior to the separation but also later gained a step brother, one participant had a significantly older half-brother from a previous marriage of her mother's, and one participant was an only child with no siblings whatsoever. Another two participants had only step siblings which they gained as a result of the divorce, and therefore were not a part of the participant's experience during the separation. With such a large portion of the sample having a sibling to some degree, it is imperative to look at the ways in which they may have had a positive or negative effect on the participant's perception of growing up faster. In this section, I will discuss the four different ways in which sibling dynamics can play a part in certain children of divorce feeling the need to grow up faster. These include birth order, exceptions to the birth order finding, chronological age facilitating understanding, and the role of gender.

Birth Order

When parents decide to split up, it is beyond question that it will have an effect on the children, but does it have more of an effect on some than others with respect to early maturation? Looking at the data in this study, it became apparent that the oldest child in birth order rank typically felt they took on the most responsibility. Whether the child became the emotional support for their parent, or took on the responsibility of caring for a sibling in a way they weren't expected to prior to the divorce, it was found that this was assumed to be the duty of the oldest daughter or son.

Some participants were able to describe this using first-hand experience as the oldest child in their own family. For example, in the case of Sam, a 21-year-old white male in the upper middle class with two younger siblings, he specifically spoke about the increase in

responsibilities he was asked to assume as the oldest. When I asked about the role change and increase in obligations connected with the divorce, he responded with,

Yes definitely. I feel I gained some responsibilities. At the time when they got divorced, my parents relied on me for a lot, like picking up my brother and sister.

I also feel I gained a lot more responsibility because at my mom's house whether it was my sister and her fighting or my brother and my sister fighting, I felt I would always be the mediator, the Gandhi of the situation.

First, in this quote it is crucial to note that Sam outright said his parents expected a lot from him. This is not something that was incredibly common amongst participants, rather many just spoke about their responsibilities. In this case though, it is evident that he felt an external pressure from his parents that he had to be someone that they could rely on. As a result, he took on a role that could be compared to a third parent, given the responsibility of taking his younger siblings to and from school. He also Emphasized the need to be there for them emotionally as someone they could rely on.

It's also interesting to note that Sam took on the role of mediator between a parent and a sibling or between siblings, rather than other participants aforementioned who held that role between two parents. This goes back to the theme of children acting as the mediator but touches on a different aspect. Due to the way that his parents became so reliant on him post-divorce, he felt pushed to be the one to bring peace into any given situation that was asked of him. Sam's case perfectly exemplifies how being first in the family's birth order can prompt an accelerated entry into adulthood.

In comparison with Sam's interpretation, I also interviewed participants who were middle children or even the youngest in the family. In these instances, the interviewees would recount

the ways in which they saw their older sibling as the one to grow up the fastest. They watched as the older sibling took on additional responsibilities that they were not expected to because of their birth rank. Alex, a 19-year-old upper middle class white male whose parents divorced when he was 13, was the younger brother in the male sibling pair that I interviewed. In Alex's case he recognizes his birth order protected or shielded him from needing to grow up faster. When prompted with the subject of his role in the family changing prior to the divorce, he thought a moment before answering, "I don't know, I'm the third. I was just taking it for what it was I didn't really have to do anything, I didn't really have to step up. It normally went to my brother. No one really came to me for advice or anything about it just because I was one of the younger ones."

In this quote, Alex expresses in multiple ways that he didn't really feel things had changed with his level of responsibility, or as he puts it, he didn't feel the need to be "stepping up." He attributes this to his birth order in the family, and explicitly says that no one really expected anything more out of him other than just dealing with the divorce because he was the third born. He also says that he usually went to his brother, which is interesting to note because his brother was not actually first in birth order, but second. I believe this was due to their shared gender, as Alex stated he would have preferred to go to his older brother rather than his older sister when it came to things surrounding divorce. The role of gender in growing up faster will later be discussed in more detail in connection with sibling relationships. Through this excerpt, one can see that Alex's birth order shielded him from having to take on additional responsibilities in comparison with his two older siblings and therefore it can be presumed that being the third child acted as a protective factor from forcing him to ultimately grow up faster.

In this section, I have primarily focused on the role of the older sibling in growing up faster than the others. I believe it is important, however, to also acknowledge the ways in which siblings other than the oldest also felt the repercussions of growing up faster, though in slightly different ways. In this study, it was found that often times the younger siblings felt they were still obligated to grow up more quickly as a result of the divorce, but that their older sibling just took on more of the responsibilities. For example, in the case of Jayden, an African American Hispanic individual who was the youngest of three boys at the time of divorce, when asked if he felt his role in the family changed as a result of the separation he responded with, “No. I just a little kid so nothing really changed for me.” This statement relates a previous part of the interview when Jayden spoke about his eldest brother who was 12 at the time when he was only six. Because Jayden’s brother was the oldest, he was expected to step up and take care of the younger siblings. From this it seems as though Jayden didn’t truly feel that he had to grow up, attributing that role to his older sibling. However, a short time later in our interview, when inquiring about how he feels now looking back at his parent’s divorce, he responded with, “I think it’s for the best outcome and then having to have a single parent you have to grow up and learn some of these other things faster which I think helped me in the long run.”

By examining these two excerpts, we can see that though Jayden initially said that he felt his role did not change because of the divorce, when asked a slightly different question, he was able to explicitly indicate that he still ultimately grew up more quickly as a consequence of his parents’ divorce. This could be because younger children compare the responsibilities they gained with their older sibling counterparts, and therefore do not initially recognize their perceived increase in subjective age in the same way as their older siblings. Just because he saw

his older sibling take on more than he did, however, does not discredit the fact that he nonetheless grew up quicker or as he put it “learned things faster.”

Whether I was interviewing the oldest in the family or the youngest, one thing became clear: being the first born played a large role in that child’s experience of growing up faster. Through Sam’s example, we comprehend his first-hand experience of how his birth order affected his parent’s dependence on him, as they expected him to help with his younger siblings and how this accelerated his maturation. While on the other hand, through Alex’s account, we can see that even if a child may not be the first born, that they are more than able to recognize that the older siblings are typically the ones getting handed a more burdensome role post-divorce. Finally, by looking at Jayden’s example, we can also see the ways in which the younger or youngest children still grew up more quickly as a result of their parent’s divorce, albeit perhaps not as fast as the oldest sibling. In the next section, however, I will show examples that break this mold of the oldest child accepting the most responsibilities, and rather focus on cases when the younger children take that role on instead and why.

Exceptions to Birth Order Effects

Though it was found in this study that typically the oldest sibling acquired the greatest amount of responsibilities post-divorce, there were some exceptions that defied this “norm.” I discovered that with a couple of participants, it was actually the younger sibling who felt as though they had to step up and take on a more adult role in the family. Certainly, every family is different, and the individual circumstances dictate the way things unfold, so the reasons as to why this was the case varied in each subject. However, certain factors seemed to make it more likely that a sibling other than the oldest would be the one to grow up more quickly as a result of the divorce. For example, looking back at the initial case study of Sarah, even though she had an

older sister that took on a lot of responsibility, Sarah still felt that she became the voice for her twin sister. In other circumstances, the exception to the typical rule of birth order was much more visible and prominent. For example, in Dylan's experience, who is a lower-middle class white male whose parents parent's divorced when he only was 10, it was evident that he was the one who took on the role of growing up faster in order to be there for and care for his disabled mother. Throughout the interview, it became evident that Dylan had to mature swiftly in order to not only take care of his mother, but also himself. When asking him about who he felt was more affected by the divorce between him and his older brother, he replied with,

He didn't have to worry about the divorce because he was already graduated high school. He had moved in with some friends and was working at the time. It didn't really have an effect on him per say ... He didn't really have to deal with it. I was left with my mom who was heartbroken, living off disability, and because of this massive amount of surgery she was doing, she got addicted to prescription pills. I had to take care of her, I had to take care of myself. I did my own laundry, I cooked my own food. I never got help with homework.

Dylan's biological brother was significantly older than him at the time of the divorce, and this played a large part in the reason that Dylan was the one who had to grow up and take on more adult responsibilities. His brother was already grown and had left the home by the time of the divorce. As Dylan mentioned, the divorce had little to no effect on his brother because of this. However, only being 10 at the time with no way to escape the repercussions of the divorce, Dylan took it upon himself to care for his mother and ultimately himself as well.

It's also imperative to draw attention to the role that class played in his case as well. With his mom being on disability and his father remarrying and moving away shortly after the

separation, they were struggling financially. Only with the help of his grandfather were they able to make ends meet. So not only was he worried about taking care of his mother emotionally and physically, but he was also constantly worried about their financial stability. Therefore, through looking at Dylan's example we can see how having an older sibling that is deemed "too old" to be truly effected by the divorce, leads to the younger sibling growing up faster to deal with the aftermath.

Another participant, Gabriella, was a second anomaly with respect to her birth order. Gabriella, whom I have previously referenced, was actually the youngest of three. Having both an older brother and sister, and being only 10 at the time of the divorce, it was expected that one or both of them would be the ones to take on more adult responsibilities. This is not the way that Gabriella remembers it though. When she spoke about how the divorce affected her, it was largely tied to the growing up she felt did not only to be there for her parents, but also for her older siblings. When asked if her role changed post- divorce she was quick to answer, "I definitely would say yes. I really became second mom to my siblings at least. At least I know to my brother, because him and I got really close from it. I'm definitely the caretaker of the family, at least when it comes to emotions... Even though I was so young, I definitely gained a lot more responsibilities than my siblings ever had."

This was something that was more out of the ordinary than Dylan's case because both of her siblings were still at home and closer to her in age, yet she still ended up being the one to step up and grow up. With this instance being a bit more unusual, I probed as to why she believed things transpired the way that they did. She attributed this to her brother being able to do no wrong in her parent's eyes, and her sister being "old enough" to get away from it all. She saw herself as being caught in the crossfire, and therefore being the one who did the most

growing up as a result of the divorce. In Gabriella's case it is also thought-provoking to consider that at the closing of our interview when I typically asked participants why they thought that children were affected differently by divorce, she drew largely on her own experience attributing it to birth order. Differing from what I found in the majority of my participants, she believed that it could be due to your role in the family saying "If you're the oldest if you're old enough when your parents get a divorce, you can get away from them and go to school. If you're the youngest though, you're just stuck there." This quote opposes what I found to be the norm in regards to birth order, and it further raises an interesting point by showing how one's personal experience can affect their beliefs about something on a larger scale.

Though my results showed that the older sibling typically defaulted as the one growing up faster because of their role in the family, there was indubitably exceptions to this finding. In the case of Dylan, it was more straightforward as to why he was the one who had to take care of his mother, as his older brother was essentially already out of the picture when his parents got divorced. In Gabriella's case however, it was a bit less obvious, and therefore more fascinating to see why she felt this was the case for her. Regardless of the reason, in both circumstances: these participants strayed from the norm, grew up faster, and took on more responsibilities than their older sibling counterparts. In the next section, I will clarify the role that age plays in being able to fully comprehend a parent's divorce, and from that, how it helps to decipher the range in ages of what participants are most affected by the divorce.

Chronological Age Facilitating Understanding of the Divorce:

Similarly as birth order plays a large part in sibling's roles following the divorce, age also plays a significant role in which siblings are truly able to understand the magnitude of their parent's divorce. To be cognizant of the implications of a parental separation, a child must be of

a certain age and mental capacity. Though younger children can pick up on bits and pieces of what's going on and feel some of the effects of the divorce, to truly comprehend the ramifications, I believe the child must be older. When sifting through my data, regarding siblings, the notion that age acts facilitates understanding is a sound conclusion. Further, the data also supports that age had an effect on certain siblings level of understanding.

In the case of the three sister pair that I interviewed, including the identical twins, this was something that was very apparent. At the time of the divorce, Danielle the oldest sibling remembered being 10, where her twin sisters Sarah and Megan remember being 5 years old. Here, it is interesting to note that though the twin sisters are currently 3 years apart in age from their elder sister, they have subjectively different memories of how old they were at the time of the divorce. This is intriguing because it shows that children have a variance in the recollection of their age at the time of the divorce, and perhaps could have different memories regarding several aspects of the divorce as well. Be that as it may, throughout our interview, Sarah reflected on how her age affected her level of understanding in comparison with her older sister Danielle. When initially asking about her relationship with her siblings and who she believed was most affected by the divorce, she responded with,

I would say my older sister was probably certainly most affected by it. Like I said my (twin) sister and I were so young...I understood something was going on but I didn't know what. I think if I had been older and I would have understood the weight of the moment, and I'm sure many more too.

Here, Sarah very vividly illustrates how her age left her unable to truly fathom what was going on with her parent's situation. As she stated, she knew that something out of the ordinary was happening, but she wasn't quite sure what, and couldn't truly understand what everything

meant. A key part of this passage is that she feels that she would have understood more had she actually been older, as her sister Danielle was. And because she lacked that level of understanding, she felt the divorce actually had less of an effect on her, logically so. Therefore, it can be assumed that with age comes understanding, and with understanding comes a greater increase in perceived subjective age. Thus, it would make sense that Danielle was the one who grew up faster because she was older and had a higher level of comprehension of what was actually happening.

This was not something that only Sarah felt however; her twin sister Megan also spoke about how she didn't truly grasp what was going on with her parents at the time because of her age. When asking her to remember how she felt during the divorce, she expressed a range of emotions saying that she felt and experienced different feelings all at once. I countered by saying that it was understandable with how young she was and she then responded with "It's all a blur and then when I understood everything when I was older I was like 'Holy Shit, I had no idea what was going on.'" In this, we see that by looking back, when Megan was younger in the midst of the divorce, she truly had no idea of what was transpiring between her parents. However, when she aged, she was able to genuinely understand. Through looking at both of these younger twin's accounts of how their age prevented them from completely understanding what was going on, it sheds light on the idea that with age comes understanding, and further that the older sibling who typically has a better idea of what's actually going on will ultimately grow up faster because they know the truth, and must then deal with it.

Just as age plays a large role in who isn't truly able to understand the significance of the divorce, it also plays a part in who is not only old enough to really understand things, but perhaps even more so, old enough to not feel the effects as significantly. A few of the participants in my

sample had parents' divorce much later in their lifetime, four of them reporting being at least 16 years old at the time the divorce began. With these subjects, it was evident that not only were they old enough to fully comprehend the situation, but tended to be generally less affected because of their mature age. While interviewing Jessica, a white upper class female whose parents divorced when she was 17, when speaking about how she felt during the time of her parent's divorce, she said, "It's probably different for a lot of other people because they were younger. I'm sure it was a lot harder on people, but just because I was so much older, I guess I probably just understood more then, than when you were a kid." Here, Jessica explicitly comes out and says that she thought the divorce was less hard on her because of her age and her level of understanding. Though she was the younger sibling in this case, her older sister being 19 at the time, she was still old enough to "get away," from the divorce and its ramifications. At one point she even outright said that she was glad she could drive to be able to escape her home life during the divorce. Therefore, we can see that just as a young age can act as something that inhibits certain siblings from understanding, it can also promote understanding in siblings that are "old enough."

Regarding age in this study, there was a presumed range in which children appeared to be the most affected. This range began at about age ten and ended at about age fifteen, which 9 out of 20 participants fell into. It is believed that this is because this time is linked to prime stages of development in a child's life, and also at this age, children do not have much freedom and therefore are subjected to more of the divorce. In the last part of this section, I will analyze the role gender plays in sibling relationships and growing up faster as a child of divorce.

What's Gender got to do with it? Sibling Roles Rooted in Gender Norms

With the external pressures thrust upon the population in U.S society today, there are certain assumed things that individuals are either expected to do or not to do based on their identified gender. Because of societal expectations, women are innately expected to be the caretaker or nurturer whereas men are presumed to be the provider and protector. Are these gender norms typically something that effect children of divorce in the same manner though? As previously stated in the methods section, this study had an almost identical breakdown when it came to participants identified gender, featuring 11 females and 9 males. Because of this, it became something I chose to focus on contrasting in different ways due to the comparable ratio. When I began to play closer attention to this facet in particular, it became evident that participants told their story through a very gendered narrative that appeared to be directly influenced by the stereotypical gender roles around male and female expressions of emotion. However, another critical finding related to the construct of gender also began to materialize itself in relation to sibling roles. Essentially, in this study, it was found that the gender of the sibling played a role in the specific responsibilities or duties children assumed post-divorce, and that these roles were directly tied to and dictated by stereotypical heteronormative gender norms.

Though gender is something that has been briefly touched on in several other sections of this paper, it was specifically in this segment where the most significant findings related to gender emerged. When looking at sibling relationships and analyzing role changes in the family post-divorce, it was found in the majority of subjects that the new gained responsibilities were in some way tied to traditional hegemonic gender roles. For example, in the case of James, who is a 22 year old upper middle class white male whose parents divorced when he was 15, when he spoke about his role change in the family post-divorce, it was almost entirely coupled with

dominant male ideology. Specifically, when asking him to think about the effects of the divorce on him in comparison with his siblings, he responded with

When you're the oldest one of four- I'm sorry second oldest, I was the oldest guy.

My dad would always tell me, 'Be the man of the house,' and stuff like that. He'd tell it to Alex too, but I always felt like I had to- both of my parents would tell me that so I felt like I had to. I didn't want to break down, but I never really felt like I wanted to actually, so I don't know. I also felt like I had to be strong so that my siblings could try to see that. I don't know what I'm trying to say; but yes, sort of like be the man of the house thing.

James is the older brother of Alex, who I spoke about earlier regarding a quote recognizing his own birth order. He further referred to his older brother as the one who he and his other siblings went to as the older male. Learning this, one can understand as James points out, that although he was not the oldest sibling in birth rank, he explained how his gender trumped his birth order. He states that although he was second born, he still felt the obligation to take on the responsibilities generally handed off or expected of the eldest, because he was the oldest male. This is likely due to the tradition of men in our society today feeling a need to be the protector of not only themselves, but others they care about as well. However, James was not yet a man, but rather just a young boy trying to fill some big shoes. When he accepted the onerous duty of becoming the "man of the house" at only 15, he was put into a position that many men don't even typically internalize as their role until they have a family of their own. By examining his persistent gendered narrative throughout, it appears that he used his masculinity as means to mask his emotions, and tried to exemplify the strength that he perceived his siblings needed from him. He felt as though he couldn't break down for their sake, but also uses a masculine narrative

to state that he felt he “never really wanted to anyways” though this may not have actually been the case. Consequently, we learn the ways in which James’ gender played a role in his accelerated adulthood in connection with his sibling relations.

In James’ case, it is imperative to examine where he explicitly expressed the need to become the “man of the house” as something that his father expected from him as the oldest male. Here, it is critical to see the joint role that his parents played in his accelerated maturation because of their expectations for him to assume this mature role. Though James said that his father would also tell this to his younger brother of two years, Alex, he went on to say how both of his parents primarily emphasized their expectations to him. This led him to feel incredibly obligated to do so, as he did not want to disappoint or disrespect his parents. In this way, it seems as though the relationship between his birth order and gender interact in a manner that led his parents to see him as the candidate to be the most responsible post-divorce. Through James’ example, it is shown how gender in addition to birth order can influence the expectation of whom should be, and ultimately does grow up faster as a consequence of the divorce.

This gendered conjecture is not something that was only seen in male participants, but rather one that presented itself in female participants as well. The difference, however, surrounds the expectations placed on them based on their identified gender. In general, where males are assumed to take on the role of the protector, females are expected to take on the role of the nurturer. The adherence to this gender stereotype was in fact consistent in the female participants as well. In the instance of Kendall, whom I previously referenced as emotional support for her father, this presumed gendered role is illustrated very clearly. Kendall was one of the only participants who primarily lived with their father following the divorce, along with her three younger brothers. Without the involvement of her mom, she took it upon herself to fulfill the

nurturing, motherly role that was generally absent. When initially asked about her relationship with her siblings and whether or not that changed following the divorce, she replied with,

So I kind of took over that mother figure in a sense, where I was feeding them, I would take them to shower or I would help give them showers. I would take them to school. I would go to parent teacher conferences, things like that because my mom wasn't in that role and I had to fulfill that, but it helped me get a lot closer to them [younger brothers].

This powerful excerpt shows the interaction between Kendall's birth order and her gender with regard to her experience of growing up faster. Unlike in James's case, Kendall was actually the oldest sibling, so she did follow the aforementioned notion that the oldest child generally grows up the fastest. However, in her case, she really helps to show the difference between the perceived gender roles in sibling relationships. In contrast to James's testament, Kendall expressed the opposite narrative in reference to being the only woman in the house, and therefore feeling the moral imperative to take on this role of the nurturer. She internalized the role of being their "mother," which is an extreme change for an eleven year old girl. This is another key difference between James and Kendall's case in the sense where James only spoke about being the man of the house, Kendall explicitly used the term "mother," for her new gendered role. This is interesting because though they were essentially speaking about an incredibly similar idea, Kendall took it a step further by saying she actually felt like the mother to her younger siblings. She also goes into much more detail about what kinds of mannerisms she adopted with her intersecting role as the oldest female sibling compared to James, who only stated the feeling of need to be the man of the house without really defining what that entailed. She fulfilled all the duties a mother typically would for their children such as bath-time, school matters, and

emotional stability. At a later point in the interview, she even goes to the extreme of stating she felt as though she raised her siblings. Through Kendall's testament it is clear that her birth order and gender worked together in a way that caused her to grow up faster.

In the two previous examples presented, it was shown that a male sibling took on the "man of the house role" in a man-less household, while the female sibling took on the nurturing role in a motherless home. With that being said, it was also found in this study that a female participant could also take on that gendered role in an instance where she was actually living with her mother. In the case of Catherine, whom was 16 at the time of her parent's divorce and had two older brothers, when speaking to the change she saw in her relationship with her mother post-divorce, she had this to say "Our relationship changed a lot and I feel like I had to mother her, more especially right after the divorce... I was taking that role over and helping around the house and such." This is an important quote because it shows that not only does taking on the expected gendered role happen in cross gender child parent pairings, but also in alike or same gender parent child relationships. When Catherine's mom was devastated after finding about the ongoing affair of her husband, Catherine alluded to that because of this horrid heartbreak, she was not fulfilling the typical duties of a mother. On account of this, Catherine felt that it was her duty to step into this role rather than either of her two brothers, because of the nature of the role that was lacking. This helps to demonstrate that even in same parent child gender pairs, participants still grew up quicker, internalizing a role heavily determined by their identified gender.

By looking at both sides of the gender narrative, it is safe to assume that the intersection of gender and birth order will have some sort of impact on the expectations of the child following their parent's divorce. However, does it innately have greater ramifications for one

gender over the other? Through examining these two opposing cases of cross gender child parent pairings, and the case of a same gender parent child relationship, it appears as though the female gender comes with significantly more tangible implications, and therefore could be the why female participants often expressed they felt a greater personal impact from the divorce.

However, as previously mentioned, the males were much more likely to conceal their emotions when sharing their narrative presumably due to the stereotype placed on them by society from a young age that males shouldn't be emotionally driven beings or share their feelings with others. Due to this perceived lack of openness and vulnerability in the male participants, it is hard to dictate whether or not females were truly held to higher expectations with post-divorce duties, or rather if it is more-so attributed to the different way in which males and females share their stories. One thing regarding gender was clear. Different expectations or roles emerged following a parent's divorce based on the child's gender, and these gendered expectations contributed to the child's perceived experience of growing up faster.

Focusing on the influence of the sibling, I discussed four main factors that may affect a child's experience of an increase in subjective age tied in some way to sibling relationships. Firstly, came the notion that birth order generally could predict which child was obligated take on the most responsibility and by default grow up more quickly than other siblings. Second, I examined the exceptions where this was not found to be the case, and further explored the possible reasons why. Third, I went into the ways in which age facilitates understanding, and how it relates to which siblings are able to truly grasp what is going on and how that connects to growing up faster. Finally, I analyze the role that gender plays in siblings of divorce, and how it influences the ways in which children grow up faster, yet differently, based on perceived gender stereotyped roles. In the final section, I will evaluate the lasting effects of participant's

experiences of growing up faster as a child of divorce and discuss what implications it holds for their future.

Divorce as a learning experience

Though the participants in my sample are already considered to be fully “grown up” being at least 18, the effects of them growing up faster as a result of their parent’s divorce still carry on with them today. The subjects are currently attending college meaning they generally are not living at home with either parent for the majority of the year, and therefore are not as directly affected by the divorce as much as they were in the past as children. Despite the fact that they aren’t living at home anymore, they are still feeling long term effects of the divorce tied to their accelerated maturation. Divorce in and of itself seemed to present a unique opportunity for children to learn certain things that they may not have been able to without their parent’s separation. In this final section, I will discuss the four main ways in which growing up faster as a child of divorce resulted in enduring effects in personal internal changes, transformations in their present-day views and outlooks, and finally what they hope for themselves in the future.

Internal Changes

A commonality shared amongst many participants was an expression of how they saw themselves change into the person they are today as a product of the experience of their parent’s divorce. This came in different forms for each interviewee, but all generally revolved around the common idea of taking something from the divorce that was typically negative, and framing it in such a way that they turned it into a positive internal characteristic change. Though this is something incredibly hard to do, especially at such a young age, the participants seemed almost grateful for their experience. Many subjects even said that they would not have necessarily been shaped and molded into the person they are today without the experience. Recognizing their own

positive internal changes and being able to attribute them to the adverse circumstances they experienced during their parents' divorce is a result of their accelerated maturation.

For example, in the case of Megan, one of the twin sisters I interviewed, she saw herself inherit a positive character attribute as a result of something her dad taught her that she sees herself still exhibiting to this day. Megan's dad always treated she and her sisters much older than they were by giving them many adult responsibilities starting at a young age. He always held them accountable for their actions, and taught them that they always should do the same. It was clear that this was something that stuck with her to this day. At one point in the interview, she spoke about how her father had felt that their mother always played the role of the victim, so he wanted to make sure his children would not do the same. When specifically asked whether she thought the divorce had any effect on her views and outlooks, she responded with

The best example I can see is with my dad and victimizing I think... One positive thing that he's done with us is he's always said 'You're 100% responsible for your own happiness, your own success or failure.' So I don't blame other things on other people... I think that was a really good thing my dad did because it made me feel empowered because I felt I could change it if something is happening.

That was a positive thing.

Megan felt that because her dad instilled such a strong value of self-accountability in her from a young age by expecting her to prematurely grow up and always accept responsibility for her actions, that she refuses to be the victim in her own life today. She was taught that her life and its outcomes were in her own hands and that if she wanted something to change, she had to make it happen herself and not expect it to be done for her. She even went as far as to say that through this lesson from her father, that she felt "empowered" in the sense that she can truly

dictate the outcomes of her own life. She was able to take this very negative experience of her dad constantly calling her mother a victim, learn from it, and as a result, grow up faster to become the exact opposite of the role that he so much despised. At another point in the conversation, she also pointed out how through this change in mindset, she learned to speak up for herself because she realized this was something that her mother never did. So, in turn she would do everything in her power to avoid taking on that victim role her father so frequently discussed. Therefore, it can be assumed that as a result of her parent's divorce and her accelerated maturation, she grew up with a lasting positive quality that Megan holds as a core value today.

Another example of the effects of growing up faster in some way leading to long term effects on the participants can be seen in a slightly different way in Dylan's case. Dylan is the white male whom I previously wrote about as an exception to the general birth order rule who took on a substantial amount of responsibility following the divorce. As formerly mentioned, Dylan felt obligated to take care of his disabled mother emotionally, physically, and even a little bit financially following his parent's separation. Surely all of these responsibilities combined directly influenced his adapting to growing up quickly, but it's interesting to note that he does not see this negative. When asked about his role change or being responsible for a parent post-divorce, he only had good things to say about the struggle of growing up quickly at such a young age stating, " My mother was- no fault to her, I understand what she was going through. Like I said the process made me stronger... In a sense where a lot of people might have crumbled under situations like that, I think it made me a lot stronger."

It's clear that Dylan recognizes the challenge he faced of having to grow up faster because of the divorce, but looks back on it with positive regard believing that it was something

that led him to be the independent person he is today. He does not try to attribute blame to his mother for the duties he had to take on, but instead empathizes with her, and is almost appreciative toward her for the experience. He describes this experience as something that may have been the demise in others, but in himself, saw it as something that made him resilient. In the end, Dylan was somehow able to frame this incredibly unpleasant situation into an opportunity for personal growth and advancement, which is something that inherently takes a vast amount of maturity.

In these two different cases, we can see the lasting implications that growing up as a child of divorce had on the participants in this study. Without this experience, the changes that the participants identified in themselves may have occurred significantly later in life or perhaps not at all. Regardless of the nature of the personal internal changes the subjects in this study saw in themselves, it was clear that the majority of participants felt their experience of growing up faster because of their parents' divorce had a significant impact on the way they became the person they are today. However, though Dylan and Megan both framed this change in themselves as something they both personally saw as beneficial, it is important to note these are their subjective experiences, and we cannot ultimately declare whether or not this is fact. In the final two sections, I will discuss the ways in which the participant's experiences of growing up faster had a lasting impression on their present-day views and outlooks, both regarding who they want to be now and in the future.

What they Learned: Who They Want to be Right Now

Interview after interview, the participants in this study all in some way spoke about how their own parent's divorce had an influence on many of the views and outlooks they call their own today. In many, a common theme emerged of learning who they want to be presently

because of something they learned from their experience of growing up faster as an effect of their parent's divorce. Some spoke about what they wanted for themselves while others spoke about what they wish for in their relationships. For example, in the case of Emma, the participant's parents who were divorced the most recently, she was able to identify changes in what she looks for in a relationship now as a result of seeing what her parents went through in their own divorce. When prompted with the broad question of how she thinks the divorce has affected the course of her life, she quickly responded with,

Just for me romantically, it's just totally shifted what I want for myself in a partner. More so I think for the past several years of dating for me personally it's been more just like a lot of instant gratification and short term 'liking.' And now I feel more able to forecast what I want things to look like when I'm 50 or 60 and how I'd want to still feel then.

Emma's case is especially interesting because her parent's divorce was only finalized months ago. However, since then, she has still been able to use her parent's example to change her own ideas about what she wants for herself, and also in a partner. She was certainly already a grown up when her parent's divorced being 21 years old. To some degree though, she has grown up in different ways over the past few months in regard to having different views for what she wants now as a result of seeing her parent's get divorced. She was able to come to the realization that up until this point in her life, she was pursuing romantic relationships that lacked sustenance and rather only provided her with short time happiness. Now, she feels that through seeing the dissolution of her parent's relationship, that she is better to able to envision the way that she wants her own relationships to look like. By using her parent's failed marriage as an example, she was able to look back on her own past and grow up to create a new reality of what she wants

for herself in the present. She sees it as beneficial that she was able to recognize this harsh realization when she did, and that through better knowing what she wants for herself now in a relationship, that it will also help her moving forward into her future.

Despite the fact that she doesn't express exactly what she hopes for in her own life, during the interview it appears that she wants the opposite of the many negative aspects of her parent's relationship. Specifically, she talked about her mother feeling trapped as a stay at home mom without finances of her own. Her mom's situation ultimately led her to staying in the relationship longer because she felt "trapped," and as though she couldn't start over at her older age. She also repeatedly spoke about a lack of love in their marriage, even referring to her parent's marriage as "dead." By the way that she spoke about these things in such a negative light, it gave the impression that she wants something better for herself. Therefore, when she is married at her parent's age, it can be inferred that she wants to still feel passion and zealously, and at the same time also never have to feel as though she is staying in a marriage with someone solely because she has no other option. Though not much time has passed since the time of her parent's separation, it is still evident that the experience of her parent's divorce has caused Emma to grow up more quickly to consider what she wants and hopes for in her own relationships.

Other participants expressed more concrete ideas about their future goals. In Evan's case, he was able to take something he saw as a downfall of his parent's relationship and turn it into an example of what he wants in his own current relationships. When reflecting on the different ways his views and outlooks have changed as a result of his parent's divorce, he realized an important change in his current outlook on companionship stating,

I do have this idea now that I probably wouldn't have then that it's more important for people to be complete in themselves before they get together or before they enter a relationship. Because if you are expecting certain things from other people, like say my mom expecting my dad not to smoke weed, when they do not change because it sucks to change who you are you won't feel happy yourself. When they don't change, and you were expecting that, then it will throw a total damper on the relationship and so, you might have to get divorced or something like that or break it off or whatever. So, I'm looking forward to meeting somebody like that in my life, but not expecting anything like I just want to-- it just has to happen naturally rather than feeling the pressure from society to get married at a certain age or anything or even to get married at all.

Evan saw these expectations that his mom had for his father as something that ultimately led to the demise of their relationship. His mother surmised that solely because she wanted her husband to change in order to appease her, that he would. When this wasn't the case, as Evan stated, they ended up separating. Evan came to a realization that you can't place your own expectations on a partner with the assumption that the partner is responsible for your happiness. This realization prompted Evan to develop a new outlook including the type of companionship he hopes for in his own life. He ties his own narrative of growing up faster to his personal experience of coming to the realization that he wants to enter into a relationship for the right reasons. Further, he wants to be content within himself and not rely on a relationship to make him happy. By using his own parent's failed marriage as a model, Evan was able to grow up creating his own beliefs about what he ultimately values in his own life long relationships. Finally, Evan also touches on an interesting point of dealing with the societal pressures to get

married. This is thought provoking because generally, in U.S. society, it is the women who feels more pressured to get married. However, Evan, a middle class white male, was the only participant to speak about the coercive nature of getting married because of societal pressures.

In both these cases, the participants in this study were able to take something good out of their parent's dissolved marriage. Being able to discern what they want for their present-day life in terms of relationships by using their parent's time together as an exemplar was something that many other subjects had in common as well. Growing up with divorce as a part of their life played a huge role in their process of development and has continued to be something that is prevalent in their life today regarding the beliefs they have formed over the years about what marriage will look like for them. In the next section, I will discuss a similar topic of forming ideas based off of the example set by their parents, but instead of identifying certain things they do want, participants alternatively distinguished things they do not want.

What they learned: Who they Want to be in the Imagined Future

As previously discussed, many participants expressed the ways in which they learned what they want for themselves currently, or similarly, their change in outlook of what they now value because they experienced their parent's divorce. On the other side of this finding, was the idea of coming to an understanding of what they want for their own future lives relating to something they ultimately experienced during their parents' divorce. This idea came in all different forms, however was primarily focused on how they want to be as a future parent or spouse. Some participants even went as far as to say they don't want to be like their "bad parent" to their own children one day. For example, in the case of Ryan, he talked about an important conclusion he came to from his negative experience with his own father stating,

It definitely gave me a life lesson because I knew I didn't want to be what my dad was. I knew I that I didn't want to be the father figure my dad was to me. I knew that was something that was going to stick with me and that I would never cheat on my wife or do anything to that extent, especially be the dad that would put my kid through what he put me through.

Ryan clearly still holds a lot of pain surrounding what his father put both he and his mother through. This was evident not only through his tone as seen in this quote, but something I picked up on throughout our interview. Instead of just harboring all these negative feelings though, Ryan instead chose to use them as an example for everything he didn't want to be in his future marriage. He realized through this lasting pain that when he was in the position of being a married adult, that he would try his best not to repeat his father's mistakes. He grew up coming to value being monogamous and a quality father figure. Essentially, he didn't want to grow up in his father's likeness, but rather the opposite. Ryan also explicitly said that he knew this was something that he would carry with him through the rest of his life. Being only eleven at the time of his parent's divorce and coming to this conclusion is something that seems almost out of the question. However, because of the extent of the negative impact his father's actions had on him, he was able to decide right then and there that this was not something that he wanted to ever be himself, or put another person through. In the long run, it is unmistakable that Ryan's father had a huge influence him growing up faster and coming to his own conclusions about what he strives to be in his own future.

Many other participant's developed similar realizations regarding what they want in their future through using their experience of growing up faster as a child of divorce. Catherine was a subject I interviewed who came from an upper middle-class family with two older brothers. Catherine's story was filled with a lot of trauma and heartbreak that resulted in her feeling a lot

of resentment toward her father. She described herself as a daddy's girl prior to the divorce, but then ultimately told him at only 16 that she didn't want him in her life because he wasn't a "positive influence in it." When asked if she missed her dad she reflected on the times when she felt his presence missing, but ultimately ended with, "I don't want the man that had an affair for years in his marriage walking me down the aisle. That's not how I want someone guiding me into my marriage. That's been a thought of mine." This excerpt really helps to show the long term beliefs children develop as a result of being hurt in their parent's divorce. Being only 19 presently and not planning to marry in the near future, it is evident how impactful her father's actions were. This experience caused her to determine she doesn't want her father to be there on one of the biggest days of her life. As a result of his infidelity and constant betrayal to the whole family, Catherine has decided that she does not need her dad to be the one to give her away at her wedding. Catherine's experience of premature maturation as a result of divorce brought her to these convictions. Through this, one can see the way that parent's actions have a lasting effect on a child's future.

In both the cases of Catherine and Ryan, we can see the ways in which growing up faster as a child of divorce can lead to long term modifications in their views of the future. Through being exposed to very negative situations with their parents at such a young age, it influenced them to create very adult ideas about their own futures very prematurely. Further, we can see that by being pushed to mature quicker in order to deal with other aspects of the divorce, such as being the emotional support in Catherine's case or bearing the financial burden as Ryan did- it led them to envision a time in their own future when they may be in serious relationships of their own and ultimately decide how they want that to look based on their parent's "bad" examples.

In this final section, I discussed the ways in which growing up faster didn't end when the divorce was over, but rather carried on with the participants into adulthood through their changes in views and outlooks. First, I examined the ways in which participants saw a change in themselves as directly tied to a result of growing up quicker due to their parent's divorce. Though the participants generally saw the changes as positive, it was clear that taking such an adverse situation and framing it as something positive was not easy. I then touched on the ways the subjects in this study felt that their accelerated maturation helped them to realize what they want for themselves in their life right now, and how they saw it as something beneficial to have learned when they did. Finally, I concluded by addressing the ways participants saw their early transition into adulthood as something that's had a lasting impact on the way they imagine their future. In all of these findings, we can see the lasting implications that growing up faster as a child of divorce ultimately has on participants to this day and will continue to have into their futures.

DISCUSSION

In this study, I sought to understand the variation in the ways in which children experience their parent's divorce, and further what factors led to said differences. Following the analysis of the data I collected, I identified processes relating to accelerated subjective aging, and was able to conclude that to some extent, divorce influences children to feel they grew up faster. Though this is a broad idea, it is something that manifested itself in all of the participants in the study, just in different ways for each subject. This finding can be tied to the three main factors that influence the child to group faster including: the relationship with the parent, the relationship with the sibling(s), and using their experience of parental divorce as a learning experience.

Throughout the interview process, participants overwhelmingly spoke about the role that their parents played in influencing them to feel like they had to grow up faster. Each participant's narrative undeniably encapsulated this theme in different ways, but several of their feelings of needing to mature quicker were often tied to taking care of a parent in some form. Many children felt responsible to take care of their parents emotionally, financially, or by acting as their mediator or messenger. Along with these three “caregiving” roles, participants also felt the influence of the role of their parent leading them to grow up faster based on the way and type of information they received, whether that be having information hidden from them or being subjected to parental propaganda. Finally, participants felt they grew up faster because of their feeling of needing to in some way become a “better child” for their parent(s). In this study, these aforementioned six ways in which children felt they grew up faster can be attributed to the role of their parent(s) in the situation at hand.

With all of these findings tied to the parent's it is interesting to speculate the implications that they have for both the child and subsequently the parents. Though not explicitly stated, I believe that in situations where the participants felt they had to grow up solely for the parent, it could lead to long term resentment because the child may have felt they missed out on part of their childhood. On the other hand, however, I also believe that for some, this may have been a truly transformative experience that ultimately led many of the participants to mature more quickly, and gain a strength that they have maintained throughout the years. Finally, I theorize that while in some situations it may have caused resentment or ill feelings, this obligation brought many participants and their parents closer in a way that may not have otherwise been possible without the divorce.

The next factor deduced from this study that impacted the ways in which children felt they grew up faster during their parent's divorce was regarding the role of the sibling. When analyzing the data from the interviews, it was discerned that sibling relationships had an effect on the majority of the participants, as 16 out of the 20 had a sibling going through the same experience with them. In many ways, sibling dynamics acted as a protective factor for some, while in turn acting as a risk factor for others. The first way this manifested itself was connected with the child's birth order. Typically, in this study it was found that the eldest child would inherit the most responsibility following the separation. However, I also outlined a few of the exceptions to this rule where one of the younger siblings felt they actually grew up the fastest. I then talked about the ways that age facilitated understanding, and further how it helped to pinpoint the age range of which children generally seemed to be most affected, typically ranging from 10-15 years old. A final aspect, and perhaps the most sociologically interesting, of sibling dynamics influencing the ways children grew up faster can be seen through their self-identified gender. In this sense, it was typical of a sibling experiencing accelerated maturation to behave in the way usually expected of his or her gender, generally taking on a role not typically being fulfilled by a parent. It was indisputable though, that having a sibling contributed in some manner to the child's feeling of needing to grow up faster following their parent's divorce.

Having so many participants in the study affected by these sibling dynamics, research must consider the ramifications of this influence. First and foremost, I believe that this can have long term implications on sibling relationships. If one sibling in particular felt that they truly grew up faster than the other, and were unhappy about this, they may resent their other siblings and their parents as well. Also, considering age as something that facilitates understanding, I believe it holds huge consequences for siblings who perhaps didn't and still don't truly

understand the divorce and their experience. Finally, with respect to gender, by having children grow up to adhere to certain gender norms, I believe it will have lifelong implications on how they act as individuals and later, when they enter into their own long term relationships.

The final finding in this study tied to participant's narrative of growing up faster stemming from their parent's divorce was the ways participants used their own parent's divorce as a learning experience. When asked, participants focused on the changes in their views or imagined what their life would have been like if their parents had not separated, a link between their learning from the experience and how it shaped who they are today. The first main way this presented itself was through subjects identifying personal internal changes. For this to happen, participants often identified a negative aspect of the divorce, and reframed it as a beneficial change. The second way this change in views was seen was through the participants claiming they knew what they want for themselves presently as a result of something they learned from their experience of growing up faster during the divorce. The final modification to their outlooks took the form of forecasting what they want for themselves in the future, typically in a relationship, resulting from a lesson learned long ago from their parent's mistakes. In all three of these conclusions relating to divorce acting as a learning experience, it imperative to understand that this is directly correlated with the participants perceived narrative of them growing up faster; and further shows how their experience still affects them today, and will continue to do so into the future.

This final theme has possibly the most implications for participants in this study, as it is most pertinent to their life moving forward. Primarily, for participants who had changing views of what they hope for in their future with relationships, it will be interesting to see how this develops. It could either lead them to having a level head and entering very healthy and fulfilling

relationships, or alternatively, leave them with a negative image of relationships in general, ultimately making participants not want to pursue them at all. It would be fascinating to do a follow up study when the participants are of an older age and have had more life experiences to see how this finding transpired.

Limitations

As with any other study, this research was certainly not without limitations. The biggest limitation in this study was the time constraint. Having less than two months to do the full analysis and write this paper, unquestionably limited the amount of depth I could truly go in to. Had I been able to spend more time on the analysis and writing period, I could have found many more interesting themes and been able to incorporate more examples from the subjects. Another limitation tied to the time restriction, was the pool of participants. With such a large number of children in the population who experience parental divorce, it's hard to generalize my findings with a sample of only twenty participants. Additionally, regarding participants, the sample was possibly skewed by the methods I used to recruit. I primarily gained my subjects through recruiting by word of mouth and friends of friends choosing to participate. Only about 1/4 of my sample came through other recruitment styles such as Facebook and flyers. This could have led to a biased sample, which may have had an effect on the data.

Participants in this study were also predominately white and in the lower- to-upper-middle-class range. Without variation in the makeup of participants, it again makes it hard to have external validity and be able to generalize this study to the population as a whole. A third limitation in this study is the age of the subjects. First, because some of the participants in this study experienced the divorce up to 19 years ago, their memories may be inaccurate due to all the time passed. Also, focusing on only one very specific age group of 18-24-year olds leaves out

a majority of the overall population. Had I sampled participants from other age groups, there may have been entire different results. Some of these limitations will be further discussed as potential future areas of research. A final limitation in this study was a lack of a comparison group. Without having a control to contrast with the children of divorce, it is hard to say if this growing up phenomena is unique to this experience, or if it also happens in other situations such as children who grew up in single parent homes from infancy.

Future Research

The results found in my study provide many interesting findings with respect to children growing up faster as a result of their parents' divorce, and further hold many implications for future areas of research. One interesting area of future research, as previously discussed in the limitations, could be to look at children from single parent homes from infancy or early childhood. It could also be intriguing to study children whose parents are in very dysfunctional relationships, but remain married, to compare whether or not they felt they grew up faster as well. By adding one or more control groups to this type of study, it can help to demonstrate whether or not growing up faster is unique to children of divorce, or if it's something that happens in other scenarios as well. Another future area of research could be a very similar study, however in a longitudinal format instead. By following children of divorce throughout their experience, we can gain better insight into when the "growing up faster" begins, peaks, and perhaps ends in participants. Doing a longitudinal study with a similar research question could also produce entirely new and divergent themes from the original ones found in this study. A final future area of research could be done with the same participants when they are 30 or even 40 in a follow up study. It would be interesting to see if once the participants have had more

adverse life experiences, if they still believe divorce is as crucial of an influence as it was when they were in college.

Implications

This study holds many implications for future policy and for sociology as a whole. Regarding policy, this study should bring attention to the effects that divorce has by compelling children to grow up faster, and in turn, look at ways in which they can alleviate the stressful aspects of this process. One way to do this could be creating certain programs for children of divorce that allow them to get together with one another and be able to “just be a kid,” in a non-stressful environment. By implementing more programs that focus specifically on the child and their needs, it can help to benefit the child’s emotional adjustment and perhaps lead to a better outcome overall. More parent based interventions should also be imposed that center around taking away some of the burdens that they may be subconsciously putting on their children in an effort to alleviate the pressure of needing to mature quicker. On the contrary, there should also be more child based interventions that attempt to teach children the ways that feeling an increase in their subjective age can actually be a positive experience. Concerning sociology as a whole, children of divorce should continue to be researched to truly understand the magnitude of effects that “growing up faster” may have on them throughout their adult life.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Recruitment flyer

Are your Parents Divorced?

Hello there! Are you a student at CU between the ages of 18-24? Have your parents divorced? Do you like to engage in conversation about it? If so you could be the perfect candidate for my Honors thesis research project! If you are willing to participate in a one-to-two hour interview about personal experiences of parental divorce, please contact me immediately so we can set up an interview. Please feel free to pass this information along to people you know who might be eligible and interested in participating. Thank you!

Contact: Kaycee Morgan

Cell phone: 714-360-2218

Email: Kaycee.morgan@colorado.edu

APPENDIX B: Participant consent form

Title of research study: Understanding variation in Children's experiences of Parental Divorce

IRB Protocol Number: 17-0518

Investigator: Kaycee Morgan

Sponsor: Dr. Stefanie Mollborn

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to seek to explain why there is variation in the ways in which children experience their parents' divorce. There are no anticipated direct benefits to you, and we do not foresee any serious risks other than potentially triggering emotional responses. Prior research on the experiences of children whose parents incur a divorce is extensive and we hope to add new findings to the topic through our interview process. We invite you to take part in this research study because you are a college aged student (18-24) at the University of Colorado Boulder and your parents have experienced a divorce. We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately one to two hours. We expect about thirty people will be in this research study.

Explanation of Procedures

This study will meet one time for a 1-on-1 interview between you and the researcher. Prior to beginning the interview, you will be asked to fill out a consent form and also a demographic sheet. The study will be in a location of your choosing at a time also chosen by you that works for both parties. The interview should last between 1-2 hours and will ask questions regarding your experience of the parental divorce.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Whether or not you take part in this research is your choice. You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

Risks and Discomforts

The possible risks that can arise from this study are fairly minimal; however, you may feel discomfort or uneasiness after answering certain questions that may trigger an emotional response. Should you feel uncomfortable about answering any question, you will be reminded that your participation is entirely voluntary and that you may not answer any question you choose, or withdraw completely if they you fit. If you feel that your psychological well-being was compromised due to the study, the researcher will

inform you about Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) on the CU Boulder campus to further discuss your feelings with a trained psychologist.

It is important that you tell the Principal Investigator, Kaycee Morgan if you think you have been injured as a result of taking part in this study. You can call him/her at 714-360-2218.

Potential Benefits

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. Although this research may not directly benefit you, it will benefit society by adding to the already existing body of research on the variance of experiences children have with their parental divorce.

Confidentiality

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Research information that identifies you may be shared with the University of Colorado Boulder Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including people on behalf of the Office for Human Research Protections. The information from this research may be published for scientific purposes; however, your identity will not be given out.

There are some things that you might tell us that we CANNOT promise to keep confidential, as we are required to report information like:

- Child abuse or neglect (Whether it is still happening, or happened in the past)
- A crime you or others plan to commit
- Harm that may come to you or others

Questions:

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at 714-360-2218 or Kaycee.morgan@colorado.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may talk to them at (303) 735-3702 or irbadmin@colorado.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

APPENDIX C: Interview guide

I would like to start off by saying that there is no time constraint on our interview and the more in depth answers you provide, the better. Please feel free to tell me anything you feel comfortable sharing, and remember everything is completely confidential. Okay?

1. To begin our conversation I would like to ask you few general questions about your parents' divorce. Tell me about your parents' divorce. Start off by describing what you remember of your parent's relationship before the divorce. Probe: Looking back now, what do you think the reason is for your parents' divorce?
2. What was your relationship like with each parent like before the divorce? Probe: What about after? Was it better with one parent in particular, and did that remain consistent after the divorce or did it change?
3. What was your relationship like with your siblings both before and after the divorce? Probe: Do you feel the divorce brought you closer together or pushed you apart? Do you think you or your sibling(s) were more affected by the divorce? Why do you believe that was the case?
4. Was there any one else close to you during the time of the divorce that influenced your experience? Probe: How so? A close friend or relative?
5. During the time of your parents' divorce, did you ever attend counseling or therapy; and if so what was that experience like for you? Probe: Was it family counseling or individual? Did you choose to attend, or was it mandated by either parents or the court systems?
6. What was your custody arrangement like and how was it decided? Probes: Did you choose this, or was it set for you by either your parents or the court system? Was it always this way or did it change over time? Did this arrangement make you feel uncomfortable in any way, perhaps about living situation during the time?
7. At the time of your parents' divorce, how did you feel about it? Probe: Were you ashamed or fearful of others finding out or having to tell them about your parents' divorce?
8. Was divorce something that was fairly normal at your school or in your community at the time, or do you feel it was rather stigmatized?
9. Did your role in the family change after your parents' divorce? Probe: Do you feel as though you gained responsibilities or had less than before? Did you ever feel like you were responsible for a sibling or even your parent in a way that you weren't prior to the divorce?
10. Do you feel that during the process they gave you enough, too much, or too little information regarding what was going on with them at the time of the divorce? Probe: Were your parents honest with you about the divorce?
11. Looking back from where you are now, how do feel about your parents' divorce? Probes: Did you view it as a failure? Did you feel personally responsible? Or did you think that it was a beneficial decision or "for the best" for your own personal well-being?
12. In sociological research we often look at how things like race, class, gender, and other similar factors contribute to outcomes. Do you think that any of these factors, or any other notable ones shaped your experience of your parents' divorce?
13. Compared with other friends you might have whose parents are divorced, how do you feel your parent's divorce affected you in comparison? Probe: Do you feel you were affected more or less than others who may have been in the same situation?
14. How do you think your parents' divorce has affected the course of your life? Probes: Why or why not? Do you believe it affected your academic success, how? Your social relationships, how? Your mental well-being, how? Your views or outlooks, how?
15. Think about what your life would be like if your parents never would have got a divorce and compare what you think would be the same or different?
16. Do you think that the effects of your parents' divorce on you have increased, decreased, or stayed the same over time? Probe: Why do you feel this way?
17. If there is anything else you would like to talk about, or feel that you didn't have a chance to share about during the interview please feel free to do so now.