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Social Support, Religiousness, and Posttraumatic Growth in Young Adults Following
Parental Divorce

by

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A thesis

Presented to the faculty of

Towson University

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Masters of Arts

Department of Psychology

Towson University
Towson, Maryland 21252

May, 2015

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Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines | 30

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Christa Schmidt, my advisor to this project. Her encouragement, support, optimistic spirit, attention to detail, and dedication to develop me as a researcher and author was essential to the successful completion of this project and my personal development throughout graduate school. I would also like to thank Dr. Marianne Dunn who further inspired me to invest in research and encouraged me to work hard and dream big. I similarly have enormous gratitude for Dr. Karen O'Brien who is due so much credit for assisting in the beginning of my journey in the field of professional psychology and supporting me along the way. In addition, my family played an enormous role in supporting me to complete this project through their love, encouragement, belief in me, and shared wisdom. I would like to extend special thanks to my mother, Lisa Trovato, who is my role model and inspiration in life and to my sister, Elizabeth Hoy, who selflessly proofread multiple drafts of my work and has been a trailblazer of professional womanhood. In addition to my biological family, I would like to thank my Cru Staff family who provided constant support, flexibility, and love, and who stuck by my side even in the hard times. Very special thanks to my fiancé, Josh Milam, who assisted me in conceptualizing this project from the beginning and provided me with unending love and encouragement along the way. Finally, I want to express my gratitude to God who I believe is the author of redemption and brining good from hardship. Without God's strength and love to guide me, this project would not have come to fruition.

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Abstract

Social Support, Religiousness, and Posttraumatic Growth in Young Adults Following Parental Divorce

Sarah R. Berkey

Children can be harshly affected by parental divorce (Harvey & Fine, 2010) but also have the potential to heal and even become stronger in a phenomena referred to as posttraumatic growth (PTG). The present study hypothesized that social support, religiousness, and time since parental divorce would be positively related to PTG in young adults who experienced parental divorce and that gender would partially moderate the relationships between both religious coping and PTG and social support coping and PTG, such that women would experience more PTG than men. Participants were 232 young adults recruited at a Mid-Atlantic university and through snowball sampling. Social support and religious coping were found to be significantly related to PTG. No gender differences were found in the reporting of PTG, nor did the amount of time since parental divorce play a significant role. Implications to aide children in the promotion of positive growth and healing after parental divorce are discussed.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster” (APA Trauma, 2013, para. 1). APA’s website lists examples of traumas or life altering events including the death of a loved one, severe illness, a violent crime, and even something as common as divorce (APA PTGI, 2013). Trauma can result in multiple outcomes including significant emotional and sometimes physical pain, but the possibility for substantial personal growth also arises. Often, people report that in the struggle to make sense of their lives after devastation, they grow closer to meaningful others, become more spiritual or religious, and have a greater sense of meaning or purpose in their lives (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). One population for which this may be the case is children of divorce.

Divorce as a Trauma

Debate exists regarding the question of whether divorce may constitute a trauma in a child’s life. Some adhere to the belief that the term “trauma” is applicable only to refer to a specific, major event witnessed by or occurring directly to a person and involving actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Others assert that it is not the event which constitutes a trauma but rather a person’s level of personal distress based on their perception of the event (Dulmus & Hilarski, 2003). This research maintains that a perceived trauma arises when an individual believes a significant physical and/or psychological injury has occurred, thereby devastating their worldview and leading to a new worldview in which

one's sense of meaning, control, connection, safety, and experience of dependable others is disrupted (Dulmus & Hilarski, 2003).

Divorce can be considered a trauma as it has the potential to change the basic assumptions people have about their lives and cause major disturbances across multiple spheres of life including social, financial, residential, parental, and vocational (Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2008). Multiple studies have been conducted which show the devastating effect divorce can have, especially on the children involved. Amato (2000) found that children impacted by divorce experienced psychological distress including greater depression and decreased happiness than children not experiencing divorce. The 2004 U.S. census reported that approximately one million children experience the divorce of their parents each year. Children of divorce have been found to have lower income and educational achievement than their peers (Harvey & Fine, 2010). They are more likely to cohabitate before marriage or marry younger and are more likely themselves to get divorced, a phenomena known as the intergenerational pattern of divorce (Harvey and Fine, 2010). Children of divorce are also more likely to have negative internalized behaviors such as anxiety and depression as well as more unhealthy externalizing behaviors such as acting out in school (Harvey & Fine, 2010). In addition, they often display a pattern of rebelling against authority which results in problems with school, work, social relationships, and the legal system (Stahl, 2000). Children of divorce have been seen to have more health problems than their peers (Harvey & Fine, 2010). Adult children of divorce report a fear of experiencing painful feelings and of abandonment by loved ones as oftentimes one of their parents left the family in a dramatic and painful way (Harvey and Fine, 2010; Stahl, 2000). Frequently, the family expectations of these

children are violated by a divorce which results in confusion, fear, and anger along with a feeling that they were robbed of their childhood much too soon (Stahl, 2000).

Wallerstein and Lewis (1998) reported on a 25 year longitudinal study of children of divorce and found further significant negative consequences of divorce on children. Often, in the case of divorce, a child's earliest reported memories included abandonment, terror, and loneliness. As adolescents, children of divorce were found to become sexually active and experiment with drugs and alcohol at earlier ages. In adulthood the respondents were characterized by fewer resources for paying for college and poorer academic performance, fears of intimacy, and damaged adult relationships with their parents, especially their fathers. In addition, adult children of divorce were found to expect failure in their lives and have a strong fear of change, betrayal, and being alone. While this study has shown significant maladies impacting children of divorce, findings are somewhat compromised by methodological weaknesses, including a small sample size (Harvey & Fine, 2010).

In addition to the evidence of negative effects of divorce, some studies have found that divorce can also have positive outcomes for children and families (Harvey & Fine, 2010; Herthinton & Kelly, 2002; Herthinton, 2006). Children of divorce have the potential to become more compassionate and attuned to other's feelings as an aftereffect of the divorce (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). Additionally, divorce may enable afflicted family members to escape dangerous settings such as domestic violence and abuse, giving a wider range of life choices and options to marginalized family members, and an opportunity for transforming personal growth (Harvey & Fine, 2010; Herthinton & Kelly, 2002; Herthinton, 2006). Furthermore, divorce can enable the development of

new and harmonious relationships, and siblings from divorced homes frequently become closer than those from non-divorced homes (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). With evidence to suggest that children are not only negatively impacted after a divorce but also have the potential to experience positive changes and growth, it is important to further study what factors contribute to growth in this population in order to have a more complete picture of how to facilitate the healing process.

A number of studies have looked specifically at college students who experienced parental divorce during their childhood. College students are a particularly salient group to consider in the case of the effects of parental divorce on children and adolescents because parental divorce is commonly considered a stressful and disruptive life event which can have the potential for significant adverse effects in late adolescence – the age group of most college students (Lopez, Melendez, & Rice, 2000). One study examining how parental divorce affects children into their adulthood found that adult children of divorce reported more antisocial behavior, anxiety, and depression than did their peers from married or deceased parents (Short, 2002). Young-adult children of divorce reported experiencing a number of difficulties in their relationships with their parents, other family members, and intimate partners as a result of their parents' divorce (Cartwright, 2006). Findings have also suggested some possibly adaptive effects for college students who experienced the divorce of their parents including increased levels of assertiveness (Barkley & Procidano, 1989). Parental divorce has been found to hasten college student's separation-individuation process (Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1989) and was associated with higher scores on measures for ego development, personal control, and

identity achievement for college-age males than their peers with married parents (Grossman, Shea, & Adams, 1980).

Harvey and Fine (2010) note that both themes of pain and sadness along with strength and resilience are present in the lives of children of divorce. In their review of the literature of the multifaceted ways in which divorce affects children, they note that there are a number of ways in which divorce is harmful to children but they also found that in spite of the increased risk, most children of divorce function as well as do children of non-divorced families (Harvey & Fine, 2010; Emery, 1999). Although there is substantial evidence that parental divorce can be harmful to children, most children of divorce are able to go on to have satisfying and meaningful lives, functioning as well as their peers from non-divorced families (Harvey & Fine, 2010). The process of strengthening as a result of undergoing extremely difficult circumstances is explained by the phenomena of posttraumatic growth (PTG). Research examining the factors which contribute to growth and healing in children of divorce has been sparse; however the theory of PTG can be applied to this population to understand the occurrence of positive changes in children after experiencing the hardship of parental divorce.

Posttraumatic Growth

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) describe posttraumatic growth (PTG) as “positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances” (p. 1). Posttraumatic growth, often referred to as stress-related growth or benefit-finding, has been studied with regard to traumas including bereavement, HIV infection, cancer, sexual assault and sexual abuse, combat, house fires, refugee experiences, and motor vehicle accidents (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). Although there

has been some investigation into how college students grow from negative events in general (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004), little research has been conducted analyzing posttraumatic growth in young adults who have experienced parental divorce.

Frequently, people respond to traumatic events and other highly stressful circumstances by experiencing distressing emotions, upsetting and unrewarding patterns of thinking, and even uncomfortable physical responses (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Posttraumatic growth occurs when people transcend this state and are able to assume greater levels of development and functioning as a result of the trauma. The opportunity to develop stronger supports, ways of coping, and understanding of personal strengths arises when an individual's adaptive resources and means of understanding life and their role in the world is questioned due to a traumatic circumstance. Some research suggests that this phenomenon occurs due to cognitive restructuring and reprocessing (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Cognitive restructuring is initiated through challenges to one's assumptive world which is made up of schemas about one's environment, the nature of humanity, and one's purpose in the world. When a major crisis occurs it frequently serves to shatter the assumptive world of the individual suffering bringing about a significant amount of psychological distress. One's previous beliefs about the world are no longer consistent with their experience of it. As the individual processes through his or her negative emotions and thoughts resulting from the trauma, cognitive reprocessing and restructuring begin to take place. Growth arises when people are able to build a new assumptive world in which the reality of the trauma, including lessons learned, is incorporated (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) likened this phenomenon to a major earthquake which severely damaged a community's homes and

businesses. After the disaster occurs, the community rebuilds by incorporating new knowledge gained from the experience of the earthquake, ultimately leading to stronger structures.

Like rebuilding a city after a devastating earthquake, people often grow and become stronger after a trauma. Posttraumatic growth has been found to occur in multiple domains. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) note five major areas of PTG: 1) an increased appreciation for life and a renewed understanding on life priorities, 2) closer and more supportive relationships with others, 3) an increase in assessment of one's own of personal strength, 4) acknowledgement of new life possibilities, and 5) spiritual growth. There is no doubt that trauma causes a great deal of suffering; however, it is also becoming increasingly clear that it does not lead solely to desolation. Individuals also have the capacity to learn, grow and change in a number of ways. The struggle to understand the trauma may actually lead to a deeper understanding of the meaning of life and the individual's place in it (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). One may turn to friends, family, or religion to seek support in their struggle which may result in more profound and intimate relationships with God or others (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Similarly, as one is able to see and utilize their reservoir of personal strength they become more capable to handle adversity than had once been the case. This process of learning does not simply take place on an intellectual level but also has a strong affective component. As the trauma is processed mentally and emotionally, growth begins to crystallize allowing a deeply felt loss to bring forth gain (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). In addition to the intellectual and affective processing related to PTG, a number of other factors have been found to enhance posttraumatic growth. Individual traits, environmental

circumstances, and societal elements all have the capacity to play a role in one's proclivity for PTG.

Posttraumatic growth has been measured in a number of populations, including college students and young adults. Park, Cohen, and Murch (1996) researched stress-related growth using college students and their close families and friends. Stress-related positive outcomes were found for college students experiencing stressful events such as problems in romantic relationships, problems with academics, death of a significant other, and illness or accident experienced by another. Intrinsic religiousness, social support satisfaction, number of socially supportive others, stressfulness of the negative event, positive reinterpretation, acceptance coping, and number of recent positive life events were found to be significant predictors of stress-related growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996). College students were also used in the development of Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) Posttraumatic Growth Inventory. Their sample of 604 college students which comprised of 199 males and 405 females, reported positive outcomes resulting from traumatic experiences including new possibilities, improved relations with others, greater personal strength, spiritual change, and appreciation of life. These findings were true for both male and female college students; however, women did report more benefits resulting from trauma than did men. Eight percent of the sample of college students used the separation or divorce of their parents as the difficult life event they chose to report in the study. Other traumatic events the students reported were bereavement, accidents which resulted in injury, relationship break-up, criminal victimization, academic problems, and unwanted pregnancy (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Park and Fenster (2004) used a sample of 94 college students to explore the processes through which stress-related growth takes place. Students were given measures of personal resources including religiousness, optimism, and mastery as well as measures of psychological adjustment including positive states of mind and depressive symptoms. After a period of six months students were re-administered the scales along with questions about their most recent stressful event, cognitive processing, coping, and stress-related growth. Measures included the intrinsic religiousness subscale of the Age-Universal Intrinsic/Extrinsic Scale-Revised Scale (AUI/ES-R; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989), the COPE inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989), and the Stress-Related Growth Scale (Park et al., 1996), among others. Results indicated specific coping processes, including religious coping and social support coping, were related to growth. Additionally, engagement in cognitive processing of intrusive thoughts, rather than cognitive avoidance of painful events, was positively related to growth. Stress-related growth was found to predict rises in personal resources and positive mind states (Park & Fenster, 2004).

The study of posttraumatic growth is important as it allows for positive outcomes in the face of extreme hardship. Understanding the factors that contribute to PTG increases the likelihood that people experiencing trauma can receive help that could lead to greater strength and resources in the face of trauma. Two factors which have been found to be related to posttraumatic growth are social support and religiosity or spirituality (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009). Gender has also been seen to play a role in coping methods employed in the face of trauma which can have an impact on PTG (Prati &

Pietrantonio, 2009). Further research needs to be conducted in order to assess the relationship between these factors and PTG in adult children of divorce.

Social Support

Social support has been found to be a significant contributor to posttraumatic growth (PTG). Prati and Pietrantonio (2009) conducted a meta-analysis assessing the factors related to PTG in various traumatic situations. One hundred fifty-seven articles were identified and met the inclusion criteria of quantitatively assessing a positive change attributed to a stressful event (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009). In addition to other contributors, several aspects of social support were identified as being significantly related to PTG including received support, perceived support, and satisfaction with social support. Further, it was noted that in addition to having a social support network, one could also utilize social support coping by engaging in active attempts to cope with trauma by seeking out those in their support network. Relying on social support as a coping mechanism was found to be related to PTG as it increased the quantity and quality of supportive others available to the individual suffering (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009). Additionally, social support coping allows one to engage in self-disclosure of emotions and talking about their perceptions of the stressor (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The amount that an individual chooses to participate in these types of self-disclosures and the ways in which others respond have the potential to increase the quality and quantity of social support and facilitate greater PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

The presence of supportive others after a traumatic event can promote a more positive assessment of the event and invoke more effective coping methods within the individual suffering (Schaefer & Moos, 1998). Furthermore, having a strong social

support network is thought to aide in the process of posttraumatic growth as supportive others assist trauma survivors in constructing narratives about the event that can facilitate the further development of schema change through cognitive reprocessing (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). One longitudinal study evaluated posttraumatic growth in a sample of 162 women with breast cancer and their partners. Surveys evaluating PTG, cognitive and emotional processing, and marital satisfaction were administered three times over a 1 ½ year time period after initial diagnosis. Results indicated emotional expression to others to be one of the strongest predictors of posttraumatic growth as it led to the desensitization of negative feelings, greater closeness in relationships, and reflections on personal strength (Manne et al., 2004).

Individuals have access to many different sources of social support. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) is one measure used to analyze individual's perceptions of their accessible social supports and benefits derived from those connections. Development of the scale included a sample of 275 college students and identified friends, family, and significant others as sources of social support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). In the initial development of this scale, social support from family members was found to be the more strongly inversely related to depression than friends or a significant other for college students (Zimet et al, 1988). This indicated that the familial unit is of high importance to college students. This finding was further supported by a later study in the development of this measure which found that social support from family members functioned more independently in college students than support received from friends or a significant other (Dahlem, Zimet, & Walker, 1991). The original study developing the MSPSS also found gender differences in their

measurements of social support. Women reported higher levels of social support from friends and significant others than men, but also more symptoms of anxiety and depression (Zimet, et. al, 1988). In their follow-up study Dahlem, Zimet, and Walker (1991) found that social support had an inverse relationship with depression, but this was only evident when levels of stress were particularly high. Social support from family members played a unique role in individuals' perceptions of support; however, this relationship has not been analyzed in college students who have experienced parental divorce. It stands to reason that divorce, which significantly disrupts familial life, may also affect children's perceptions of social support.

Additional studies have found gender differences in social support and stressful life events. In a study examining 115 undergraduate university students, the moderating effects of gender in the relationship between stress and social support was examined (Wohlgemuth & Betz, 1991). Participants were administered measures of stress, social support, and physical symptomatology twice, separated by a five-week period. Functional social support, or the perception of socially supportive behaviors from others, was measured using the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors (Barrera, Sandler, & Ramsay, 1981). The Social Support Questionnaire was used to measure the number of socially supportive people in an individual's environment and his or her satisfaction with the support received (Saranson, Levine, Basham, & Saranson, 1983). Social support satisfaction was also assessed using the Friends and Family subscales of the Perceived Social Support Scale (Procidano & Heller, 1983). Statistical Analyses showed that female students reported significantly higher levels of social support than men on indices including size of support system, functional support, and satisfaction with friends'

support (Wohlgemuth & Betz, 1991). In fact, for women, low perceived family support was associated with higher levels of strain irrespective of stress level. Women also reported more stressful life events and physical stress symptoms than did men (Wohlgemuth & Betz, 1991). Thus, gender was found to be a moderating variable between stress and social support. Hierarchical regression analyses were statistically significant for all models conducted with women participants while none were found to be significant for men (Wohlgemuth & Betz, 1991).

Another study examining gender differences in perceptions of stressfulness and use of social support was conducted on a sample of 186 undergraduate students. Participants were asked to read five scenarios and rate them on perceived stressfulness and type of social support they would employ to cope with the situation. Women reported significantly higher levels of stress from three of the scenarios than did men. Results indicated partial support for the hypothesis that men and women perceive stressful situations in different ways (Day & Livingstone, 2003). Furthermore, women reported they would turn to the support of their partner or friends more than men did and reported more emotional support-seeking behaviors than did men in response to stressful situations (Day & Livingstone, 2003).

Gender has also been found to affect the relationship between social support and posttraumatic growth. One study found that gender partially moderated the relationship between social support coping and PTG (Swickert & Hittner, 2009). Swickert and Hittner (2009) hypothesized that females would employ more social support coping than males as a strategy for dealing with stressful or traumatic circumstances and that this coping strategy would be associated with greater PTG. Two hundred and twenty one participants

were asked to think of a stressful or traumatic life event from the past year and then complete the Perceived Benefit Scale (PBS; McMillen & Fisher, 1998) and the Coping Strategy Indicator (CSI; Amirkhan, 1990). Results indicated that gender was significantly associated with social support coping and perceived benefits as females employed more social support coping and endorsed higher perceived benefits (Swickert & Hittner, 2009). Gender partially moderated the relationship between social support coping and posttraumatic growth, such that PTG was higher for both females and males who employed social support coping to manage life stressors and traumas; however, females were found to use social support coping at significantly higher levels than males and also reported higher levels of PTG (Swickert & Hittner, 2009). Not only was gender related to overall growth but it also predicted enhanced family closeness and increased spirituality as females reported higher amounts of each of these areas of growth than males. The authors argue that gender is related to PTG as females more readily seek out social support in times of trouble leading to enhanced social and religious connections and increased levels of growth (Swickert & Hittner, 2009).

Therefore, there is substantial evidence that social support is a factor related to PTG. People often turn to supportive others for comfort, understanding, emotional release, and healing during challenging life events. Divorce uniquely disrupts one's social support network as a group of people once united, becomes divided. Research must be conducted which examines the relationship between social support and PTG in those who have experienced parental divorce in order to understand if this relationship is uniquely affected by the divorce. In addition to relying on supportive others during challenges,

individuals often rely on their religious and spiritual beliefs in times of trouble (Gall & Guirguis-Younger, 2013).

Religiousness and Spirituality

Many religious traditions maintain themes of growth and change in response to adversity. Although similar in nature, spirituality and religiosity are conceptualized differently in the literature. Spirituality is more traditionally thought of as an intimate, individual experience in which one seeks to look beyond the self to the sacred (Bryant-Davis et al., 2012). A religious institution is not necessary for spirituality to be present as it reflects unique meaning assigned to one's personal private experience (Bryant-Davis et al., 2012). In contrast, religiousness is characterized by an individual's engagement in the shared beliefs and practices of a structured sacred institution like a church, mosque, or temple (Bryant-Davis et al., 2012). Most commonly the literature refers to these constructs together while still noting their individual characteristics.

Shaw, Joseph, and Linley (2005) reviewed eleven studies that addressed religion, spirituality, and posttraumatic growth. The authors found that religion and spirituality are often beneficial to people dealing with trauma and that traumatic experiences can often lead to positive increases in religion or spirituality. Finally the authors note that positive religious coping, religious openness, inclination to deal with existential questions, religious participation, and intrinsic religiousness are frequently related to posttraumatic growth (Shaw et al., 2005). Four of the studies were qualitative and provided idiographic evidence that religious beliefs could serve to further PTG. In a sample of people who had experienced loss, participants more committed to spiritual and religious goals in the aftermath of trauma were more likely to say that they had recovered from the trauma and

found meaning in it than their non-religious counterparts (Emmons, Colby, & Kaiser, 1998). In a sample of 16 parents of murdered children, spirituality was one of three main personal qualities which had aided in the development of posttraumatic growth through faith in God, belief in an afterlife, praying, and going to church services (Parapully, Rosenbaum, van den Daele, & Nzewi, 2002). The remaining seven studies examined in the literature search were quantitative and used either the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) (Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 1996) or the Stress Related Growth Scale (SRGS; Park et al., 1996) to measure growth after hardship. Samples included adolescents and college students, among others (Milam, Ritt-Olson, Unger, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Park et al., 1996). Findings suggest that traumatic life events can trigger the development of religious and spiritual beliefs and behaviors, and that these beliefs and behaviors can play a key role in people's personal development, growth, and psychological recovery following trauma (Shaw, Joseph, Linley, 2005).

Religion and spirituality have been suggested by researches to be factors related to the development of a sense of meaning, self-esteem, coherence, and purpose in the lives of children and adolescents (Bryant-Davis, et al., 2012; Dowling et al., 2004; Holder, Coleman, & Wallace, 2010; Markstrom, 1999; Schafer & King, 1990). Holder, Coleman, and Wallace (2010) found that children and adolescents who reported having a relationship with God or a divine being had increased happiness due to a reduction in stress and the use of more positive coping strategies. Some research suggests that religion and spirituality may positively influence the mental health of children and adolescents due to increases in access to social support, positive religious coping, and social prohibitions against risky behaviors (Chatters, 2000; Hill and Pargament, 2008). Religion

and spirituality are also related to health behaviors in adolescence including decreased substance abuse (Merrill, Salazar, & Gardner, 2001; Sharma, 2009) and risky sexual behavior (Laflin, Wang, and Barry, 2008). Thus, religiosity and spirituality are often referred to as “protective factors” that reduce the potential of negative health outcomes. These protective factors are particularly relevant to children of divorce who are at higher risk for substance abuse and risky sexual behaviors than children of non-divorced families (Harvey & Fine, 2010). Religion and spirituality may play a role in protecting children and adolescents from the harmful effects of divorce and contribute to the development of posttraumatic growth.

In their meta-analysis of one hundred and fifty-seven studies assessing a positive change attributed to a stressful event, Prati and Pietrantonio (2009) found that spirituality moderately predicted growth after a traumatic event and that religious coping was highly predictive of PTG. In fact, religious coping was found to be the strongest predictor of PTG (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009). To explain this finding the authors refer to Pargament, Koenig, and Perez (2000) which stated that religious coping can serve to give meaning to a difficult event, provide a structure to gain a sense of control in a hardship, offer comfort, give a sense of intimacy with other members of the religious community, and help enable people to make significant life transformations. Connection to a religious framework supplies individuals with a wealth of resources which can contribute to PTG. Further moderator analysis showed that general religious coping was related to growth but that positive religious coping had the most significant effect (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009). The authors note that spirituality can also provide people with a sense of community and beliefs that encourage meaning-making and promote PTG (Prati &

Pietrantonio, 2009). In addition, gender was found to be a significant predictor of the effect size of religious coping as the relationship between religious coping and PTG was stronger for women than for men (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009).

In their development of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) also found gender differences in PTG as women reported more benefits ($M = 75.18$, $SD = 21.24$) than men ($M = 67.77$, $SD = 22.07$) ($t(1,590) = 3.94$, $p < .001$) on the overall scale. In fact, factor scores indicated that one of the greatest gender differences between men and women in their response to trauma was in the area of spiritual change. Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) postulate that this may signal that women rely on spirituality to a greater extent than men to cope with difficult events and thus report higher levels of effect when using spiritual coping strategies. Thus, potential gender differences may be an important consideration in the relationship between religious coping and PTG.

Krumrei, Mahoney, and Kenneth (2011) conducted the first longitudinal study to assess adults' psychosocial adjustment using a spiritual stress and coping model. Participants were 89 adults from the community who were in the process of obtaining a divorce. Participants' views of their divorce as a sacred loss or desecration were measured at the time of the divorce using the Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005). Participants' positive and negative religious and non-religious coping were measured one year after the divorce using the RCOPE (Pargament et al., 2000) and the Brief-COPE (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989), respectively. Depressive symptoms and PTG were measured both at the time of the divorce and one year later to assess personal changes that occurred as the result of the

divorce, using the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1997) and the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Findings suggested that adults assessing their divorce as a sacred loss or desecration were more likely to report greater depressive symptoms and dysfunctional conflict tactics with their ex-spouse in the following year. Additionally, positive religious coping predicted greater posttraumatic growth and negative religious coping predicted greater depressive symptoms for the individuals divorcing in the year following the divorce (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2011). Further research should be conducted to determine if these results remain significant not only for the adults involved in the divorce but also for their children who may experience the divorce differently from their parents as they have less control over the outcomes. Bootstrapping mediation analysis indicated that the relationship between appraising the divorce as a sacred loss or desecration at the time it began and depressive symptoms one year later was fully mediated by negative religious coping. Furthermore, moderation analyses indicated that those with high appraisals of their divorce as a sacred loss were more likely to display associations between negative religious coping and depression. These findings can inform clergy, clinicians, and legal professionals who assist adults going through a divorce; however, little attention has been directed to these associations in children who experience the divorce of their parents.

Another study investigated the associations between religious orientation, religious involvement, and posttraumatic growth (Calhoun, Cann, Tedeschi, & McMillan, 2000). Fifty-four college students who reported experiencing a major traumatic event in the past 3 years were administered the Traumatic Stress Schedule (Norris, 1990), the Quest Scale, which measures the religious dimension to an individual's search for the

answers to existential questions (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993), and the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Multiple regression analyses indicated that the degree to which participants ruminated about the traumatic event soon after its occurrence and their degree of openness to religious change were significantly related to PTG. Often, a traumatic event can lead to an increase in cognitive processing and contemplation of the meaning and significance of the event (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996). In this study, the increase in religiousness may indicate openness to change or add to one's religious schemas in the face of crisis (Calhoun et al., 2000). The amount of religious participation did not independently predict posttraumatic growth, although openness to religious change was predictive of the level of PTG reported (Calhoun et al., 2000). Research further assessing the role of young adults' experience with intrinsic religiousness and religious coping when facing the hardship of parental divorce is important as evidence suggests that these constructs can play a fundamental role in facilitating PTG.

Summary

Research indicates that social support and religious beliefs and practices are factors that are associated with posttraumatic growth, and that these relationships may differ for women and men. The present study sought to examine the relationship between social support, religiosity, and gender in the posttraumatic growth of college students who experienced the divorce of their parents. Little research has been conducted assessing factors related to PTG following a divorce. Further understanding the relationship between social support, religiosity, gender and PTG after divorce could have implications for providing clinicians with more nuanced awareness of how to facilitate

the healing process. With over 6.5 million children living in divorced households in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), understanding the relationship of factors which contribute to growth and healing is both relative and meaningful to clinicians, parents, mentors, and educators. Additionally, evidence suggests that males and females experience PTG in different ways with females reporting higher levels of social support coping, religious coping, and PTG. These gender differences should be better understood in order to have a clearer picture of the healing process for both males and females following the hardship of parental divorce.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be gender differences in the reporting of posttraumatic growth with females reporting more growth than males.

H2: Posttraumatic growth will be positively correlated with perceived social support, social support coping, intrinsic religiousness, and positive religious coping such that individuals reporting higher levels of these variables will also report higher levels of posttraumatic growth.

H3: Perceived social support, social support coping, intrinsic religiousness, and positive religious coping will predict both unique and shared variance in posttraumatic growth.

H4: Gender will partially moderate the relationship between social support coping and posttraumatic growth such that female respondents will report higher levels of social support coping than male respondents which will be associated with higher levels of posttraumatic growth for females than males.

H5: Gender will partially moderate the relationship between positive religious coping and posttraumatic growth such that female respondents will report higher levels of positive

religious coping than male respondents which will be associated with higher levels of posttraumatic growth for females than males.

H6: Individuals with greater time since parental divorce date will endorse greater levels of posttraumatic growth.

Research Question

In addition to testing the above hypotheses, five open-ended questions were administered to participants in order to address the question “How do young adults grow and even flourish after facing parental divorce?”

Chapter Two:

Method

Participants

Participants were 232 young adults ranging in age from 18-25 years ($M = 21.5$ years; 66.4% female) recruited at a large Mid-Atlantic university and through snowball sampling. The racial and ethnic make-up of the sample was 71.6% White/European American, 6.9% Black/African American, 6.9% White Hispanic/Latino, 3.4% Non-White Hispanic/Latino, 3.4% Asian-American, 2.2% Middle Eastern/Arab, 1.7% Asian-Indian/Pakistani, 1.7% Biracial/Multiracial, 1.3% "Other", 0.4% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 0.4% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. The majority of the sample reported being affiliated with a religious tradition (55.6%) with 38.4% Christian-Protestant, 18.1% Christian-Catholic, 3.0% Jewish, and 2.6% Islamic. Many of the participants (59.5%) reported living fully or mostly with their mother following the divorce. A much smaller percentage reported living fully or mostly with their father (10.8%) after the divorce. The remaining participants reported living alone, with another family member or partner, or with more equally shared time between parents (29.7%). Most participants rated the stressfulness of their parents' divorce as "moderately" (47.8%) or "extremely stressful" (37.5%). Participants indicated their parents' divorce was characterized by a great deal of conflict (38.4%), moderate conflict (38.4%), some conflict (19.4%), or no conflict (3.4%). Additionally, 55.9% of participants indicated that they perceived their parents' divorce a negative event at the time of the divorce while 14.2% of participants considered it as a positive event at the time. When asked how they perceive the divorce presently, 33.6% indicated that they still perceived it as a negative

event while 47% of the sample now considered it a positive event. In addition, 40.1% of the sample reported that they had sought individual or family counseling in order to deal with their parents' divorce. The present sample reported more PTSD symptoms related to their parents' divorce ($M = 34.15$, $SD = 15.7$) than the sample on which the measure was tested ($M = 29.4$, $SD = 12.9$) (Ruggiero, Ben, Scotti, & Rabalais, 2003). Participants had slightly lower Centrality of Events (CES) scores ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1$) than the sub-clinical sample of undergraduate students on which the scale was developed ($M = 2.84$, $SD = .89$) (see below; Berntsen & Rubin, 2006). According to Cohen (1992), a minimum sample size of 126 was needed to detect a medium effect at the $\alpha = .01$ level for this particular study design. In order to further establish adequate power, 232 participants were recruited. An alpha of .01 was used for the purpose of statistical significance testing to increase statistical power.

Procedure

Data was gathered using an online survey tool designed for the collection of self-reported data. Student recruitment was facilitated through the university academic research pool as well as snowball sampling. The study was advertised using flyers in academic buildings, emails to professors inviting their students to participate, and university online announcements. Participants were asked to read an informed consent document and after indicating agreement were directed to the online survey. Students who participated via the university-sponsored research pool received research credit which they were able to use for extra credit in their courses. As added incentive for participation, all participants who completed the study had the opportunity to enter into a random drawing for a \$25 Amazon gift which was awarded at the completion of data

collection. Participant contact information was not collected in order to protect confidentiality and anonymity.

Measures

Demographic information. Participant demographic information including age, race, gender, and information regarding their parents' divorce was included on the questionnaire (see Appendix A).

Posttraumatic growth. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) developed the 21-item Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) on a large sample of college students to measure positive outcomes reported by individuals who have faced traumatic events (see Appendix B). The PTGI measures trauma-related growth on five factors including New Possibilities, Relating to Others, Personal Strength, Spiritual Change, and Appreciation of Life. New Possibilities indicates an individual's increased capacity to recognize additional options for the direction of their life than previously noted including new interests, opportunities, and motivation to change. The factor, Relating to Others, is comprised of items that denote a greater reliance on an appreciation for significant others. Personal Strengths encompasses an individual's understanding of their increased strength, self-reliance, or ability to handle difficult situations. Spiritual Change consists of a better understanding of spiritual matters and stronger religious faith. Appreciation of life notes an individual's increased valuing of their life and priorities (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Participants rated statements on a 6-point Likert scale to indicate how much change occurred in their life as a result of the divorce. Response options ranged from "I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis" (scored 0), to "I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis" (scored 5) (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Sample PTGI items include statements such as “I accept needing others” and “I have a stronger religious faith.” Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) reported good internal consistency of the PTGI with a Chronbach’s alpha of .90. The five factors also showed good internal consistency (New Possibilities, $\alpha = .84$; Relating to Others, $\alpha = .85$; Personal Strength, $\alpha = .72$; Spiritual Change, $\alpha = .85$; Appreciation of Life, $\alpha = .67$). The PTGI had acceptable test-retest reliability ($r = .71$) over two months. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) also provided support for the PTGI’s concurrent, discriminant, and construct validity. Additionally, gender differences were found overall for the PTGI with women indicating more benefits after trauma ($M = 75.81$, $SD = 21.24$) than men ($M = 67.77$, $SD = 22.07$) ($t(1,590) = 3.94$, $p < .001$). The scoring of every factor except New Possibilities also showed gender differences with women scoring higher than men. In the present study, the PTGI had good internal consistency with a Chronbach’s alpha of 0.93. The five factors also showed good internal consistency (New Possibilities, $\alpha = .80$; Relating to Others, $\alpha = .86$; Personal Strength, $\alpha = .79$; Spiritual Change, $\alpha = .83$; Appreciation of Life, $\alpha = .75$).

Social support. Three scales were used to measure participants’ perceptions of the social support available to them and the degree to which they utilized their social networks to cope with adversity. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MDSPSS) was used to measure participant’s perceptions of available social support on three subscales including family, friends, and significant other (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988; see Appendix C). Responses on the 12-item 7-point Likert scale ranged from very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (7) and included statements such as “There is a special person around when I am in need” and “My family really tries to help

me.” The MDSPSS was developed on a sample of 275 college students and demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$) as did each subscale (Significant Other, $\alpha = .91$, Family, $\alpha = .87$, and Friends, $\alpha = .85$). Zimet et al. (1988) found moderate construct validity as high levels of perceived social support were correlated with low levels of symptoms of depression and anxiety according to the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL; Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974). Multiple subsequent studies have used this instrument with various populations and found the MDSPSS to be psychometrically sound (Dahlem, Zimet, & Walker, 1991; Zimet, Powell, Farley, Werkman, & Berkoff, 1990; Clara, Cox, Enns, Murray, & Torgrud, 2003). Interestingly, in their development of the scale Zimet et al. (1988) found gender differences in their original sample such that the correlation between perceived social support from friends and depression symptoms was $r = -.43$ for men and $r = -.21$ for women. Additionally, women reported significantly greater support from a significant other, friends, and overall, than men. Social support from family was the only subscale in which there was no significant gender effect (Zimet et al, 1988). A follow up study on a sample of urban adolescents found that females reported more social support from friends and significant other than males (Canty-Mitchell & Zimet, 2000). In the present study the overall internal consistency of the MDSPSS was good ($\alpha = .93$) as was the internal consistency of the subscales (Significant Other, $\alpha = .95$, Family, $\alpha = .93$, and Friends, $\alpha = .95$).

Two subscales of the COPE (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989, Appendix D) were used to measure participants’ use of social support coping behaviors when facing adversity. Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) identify two main ways in which

individuals seek social support in order to cope with difficult life events: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. The Seeking Social Support-Instrumental Scale (COPE-SSI) measured problem-focused coping as assessed by advice, assistance, or information seeking behaviors. Four items comprised this sub-scale with statements such as "I try to get advice from someone about what to do." The Seeking Social Support-Emotional Scale (COPE-SSE) measures emotion-focused coping by assessing one's proclivity to turn to supportive others for moral support, sympathy, or understanding (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). The COPE-SSE is comprised of four items with statements such as "I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives." Each scale was rated on a four point Likert scale ranging from 1 "I usually don't do this at all" to 4 "I usually do this a lot." The COPE was validated on a large sample of college students. Both the COPE-SSI and COPE-SSE demonstrate adequate reliability with $\alpha = .75$, $r = .76$, $M = 11.50$, $SD = 2.88$ and $\alpha = .85$, $r = .77$, $M = 11.01$, $SD = 3.46$ respectively. Women reported higher tendencies to seek social support than men on both social support sub-scales. In the present study, internal consistency was good for both the COPE-SSE ($\alpha = .88$) and COPE-SSI (.82)

Religiousness and spirituality. The intrinsic religiousness subscale (AUI-R) of the Age-Universal Intrinsic/Extrinsic Scale-Revised Scale (AUI/ES-R; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989; Appendix E) was used to measure religiousness. Intrinsic Religiousness can be conceptualized as the extent to which an individual views religion as a master motive in their life (Park & Fenster, 2004). Additionally, intrinsic religiousness is thought to be internalized religious behavior that is done for its own sake rather than for a specific goal (Gorsuch, 1994). Intrinsic religiousness was assessed in order to measure participants'

views of the degree to which religion informed how they viewed themselves and the world. The AUI-R is comprised of eight items on a five point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 5 “Strongly Agree”. The scale is counterbalanced to avoid acquiescence bias with five positive items and three negative items. The negatively worded items required reverse scoring. Items included statements such as “My whole approach to life is based on my religion” and “Although I believe in my religion, many other things are more important in life (reversed).” Internal consistency reliability for the AUI-R was reported by Gorsuch & McPherson (1989) to be .83. In the present study the internal consistency for this scale was .85.

One of the most commonly used measures of religious coping in response to major life stressors, the Brief RCOPE, was used to measure participant’s use of religious coping in response to their parent’s divorce (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011; see Appendix F). The Brief RCOPE consists of 14 items assessing participant’s positive and negative coping and was initially developed using a large sample of university undergraduates. Positive religious coping strategies are considered to consist of a secure relationship with a transcendent force, feelings of spiritual attachment with others, and a benevolent view of the world (Pargament et al., 2011). Negative religious coping strategies represent spiritual strains and difficulties related to the individual, others, and the divine (Pargament et al., 2011). Respondents were asked to rate statements indicating how often they used specific strategies of religious coping in response to their parents’ divorce using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (“not at all”) to 3 (“a great deal”). The positive religious coping subscale consisted of 7 items such as “Sought God’s love and care” and “Sought help from God in letting go of my anger.” The 7-item negative

religious coping subscale included statements such as “Wondered whether God had abandoned me” and “Questioned the power of God.” Research suggests that positive religious coping is related to fewer psychosomatic symptoms and greater spiritual development after dealing with a trauma while negative religious coping is related to more symptoms of psychological distress, poorer quality of life, and greater callousness towards others (Pargament et al., 2011). Pargament et al. (2011) reviewed 30 studies using the Brief RCOPE and found that it demonstrated good internal consistency and concurrent validity. The authors also present evidence for the predictive and incremental validity of the Brief RCOPE. It should be noted that almost all studies used to assess the psychometric properties of the Brief RCOPE were conducted in the United States and Western Europe with principally Christian samples (Pargament et al., 2011). The sample queried for the present study comprised similar demographics and as such was accurately measured with the Brief RCOPE. In the present study, internal consistency of the RCOPE ($\alpha = .94$) and the subscales (positive religious coping $\alpha = .98$; negative religious coping $\alpha = .93$) was good.

Divorce as a Trauma. The PTSD Checklist – Civilian Version (PCL; Ruggiero, Ben, Scotti, & Rabalais, 2003) was used to assess symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder related to participants’ parents’ divorce. The 17-item scale was initially developed on a sample of 392 university students. A mean score is calculated with a recommended cut off of 44 for PTSD diagnostic purposes. Respondents had a mean PCL score of 29.4 ($SD = 12.9$) in the original study. The PCL demonstrated high internal consistency on the full scale ($\alpha = .94$) and each of the three subscales: Re-experiencing ($\alpha = .85$), Avoidance ($\alpha = .85$), and Hyperarousal ($\alpha = .87$) (Ruggiero, Ben, Scotti, & Rabalais, 2003). In the

present study, participants were asked to rate to what extent a list of 17 symptoms was present in their lives in the six months following their parents' divorce using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "not at all" to 5 "extremely". Items included statements such as "repeated, disturbing dreams of your parents' divorce" and "Trouble remembering important parts of your parents' divorce". The PCL demonstrated good internal consistency in the present study ($\alpha = .94$). The present sample reported more PTSD symptoms related to their parents' divorce ($M = 34.15$, $SD = 15.7$) than the sample on which the measure was tested ($M = 29.4$, $SD = 12.9$) (Ruggiero, Ben, Scotti, & Rabalais, 2003).

The Centrality of Events Scale (CES; Berntsen & Rubin, 2006; see Appendix G) and the PTSD Checklist – Civilian Version (PCL; Ruggiero, Ben, Scotti, & Rabalais, 2003; see Appendix H) were used to measure the extent to which participants experienced their parents' divorce as a trauma and an event central to their identity. The CES was developed on a sample of 707 undergraduate students in order to measure how central a person feels a certain event is to their personal identity and life story. In the original development of the scale it was found to correlate .38 with the PCL measuring PTSD symptom severity. The mean CES score for the norm sample of undergraduates with high PCL scores (>44) was 3.56 (.80 SD) while students with low PCL scores (<44) had a mean of 2.84 (.89). The full 20-item CES displayed good reliability ($\alpha = .94$) as did the 7-item short form ($\alpha = .88$) (Bernsten & Rubin, 2006). In the present study, the CES short form was used and displayed good internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$). Items included statements such as "My parents' divorce was a turning point in my life" and were rated on a five point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 "Strongly Agree" to 5

“Strongly Disagree”. Participants had slightly lower CES scores ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1$) than the sub-clinical sample of students on which the scale was developed ($M = 2.84$, $SD = .89$) (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006).

Open response. Participants were also asked to complete five open-ended questions eliciting a more nuanced perspective of their experience of both adversity and strength in response to their parents’ divorce in order to elucidate further factors related to PTG after divorce (see Appendix G). The responses were analyzed for themes relevant to the research question of “How do young adults grow or even flourish after experiencing parental divorce?”

Analysis

Preliminary analyses were conducted to assess the data for normality, and means and standard deviations for all variables were calculated. Additionally, scale reliabilities were conducted on all measures. Gender differences in PTG were examined using one-way ANOVA to test hypothesis 1. Bivariate correlations were examined to determine if the relationships between the variables of interest are in the expected directions (hypothesis 2).

A simultaneous linear regression was conducted to determine both the unique and shared variance of the predictor variables of perceived social support, intrinsic and emotional social support coping, intrinsic religiousness, positive and negative religious coping, and gender as related to the criterion variable of PTG (hypothesis 3). A one-way analysis of variance computed on the data revealed no significant difference between males and females in the reporting of posttraumatic growth. Thus, hypotheses 4 and 5, regarding the potential moderating role of gender in the relationships between social support coping

and religious coping with PTG could not be tested. In order to test hypothesis 6 participants' were asked to indicate how many years it had been since their parents' had legally divorced. Their answers were coded into a continuous variable increasing incrementally in units by two starting at 0 years and ending at 25 years. A bivariate correlation was then examined to determine if participant reports of PTG was positively correlated with longer time since parental divorce.

A two-phased process was used to analyze the qualitative data gathered from the five short answer responses related to participants' experiences of their parents' divorce. First, the primary researcher and a research assistant independently examined each of the short answer responses to identify and develop a list of common themes reported by participants for each short answer question. Then, the researchers met to compare their determinations for agreement. A list of different themes was developed for each short answer response category (see Table 2). Each theme was assigned a distinct code consisting of a number and letter to indicate whether the response was "p" positive, "n" negative, or "x" neutral. In the second phase of the process, two additional research assistants were asked to independently code each short answer response using the list of identified themes. Examples of identified themes include "changes in relating to others", "religious community played a role", and "fantasy/escapes". After coding the responses on their own, the research assistants met to compare their responses for agreement. If codes did not initially match, the raters discussed until agreement was reached. In the few cases where agreement was not reached the primary researcher served as the tie-breaker. Coded responses were then tallied up for each short answer category. Participants were able to give multiple answers per question but were not required to answer every

question. Percentages of response type or theme were calculated for each short answer question by dividing the number of times that response was used by the total amount of responses for that question. Thus, percentages were not based on the percentage of respondents endorsing that theme, but rather the number of times the theme was indicated per short answer question category, sometimes being mentioned more than once by the same respondent.

Chapter Three:

Results

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations can be found in Table 1. Upon bootstrapping analyses, only instrumental social support and centrality of events did not retain statistical significance in the bivariate correlation with the dependent variable, indicating that while these variables were significant for the present study they may not generalize to the population at large. Multiple regression analyses, with bootstrapping of 1,000 iterations, showed that perceived social support, intrinsic religiousness, positive religious coping, and negative religious coping all contributed unique and shared variance to PTG, $F(7, 231) = 14.951$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = 0.32$. The R^2 indicates that the predictors accounted for 32% of the variance in PTG. The R^2 adjusted for seven predictors was .30. Neither instrumental nor emotional social support coping reached statistical significance and thus did not control variance above and beyond the other predictors. After removing the non-significant predictors from the equation, the regression model was $PTG = -1.321 + 4.697(\text{perceived social support}) + 5.932(\text{intrinsic religiousness}) + 10.528(\text{positive religious coping}) + 3.998(\text{negative religious coping})$. The statistically significant predictors along with their beta weights, ranked from highest to lowest, are presented in Table 2. Each of the variables was directly related to PTG, with positive religious coping being the best predictor.

Qualitative analyses revealed themes related to participants' experiences of trauma and growth as a result of parental divorce. A complete list of identified themes and percentages of total times a certain theme was indicated in each question can be found in Table 3. In response to the question "How do you feel that your life is different now as a

result of your parents' divorce?" 34% of changes reported were negative, 42% of changes were positive, and 24% of changes were coded as neutral. Of the items coded as positive changes, the most frequently reported were changes to selfhood and identity (18%), parents becoming happier and more peaceful (16%), changes to non-parental family relationships (9%), changes to parental relationships (9%), and new possibilities and opportunities (9%). Of the items coded as negative changes, the most frequently reported were changes to parental relationships (17%), changes to view of marriage, romantic relationships, and values (16%), development of mistrust of others (16%), emotional changes (11%), and changes to holidays and big life events (7%).

Participants were asked to list people or groups that they turned to for help in response to their parents' divorce and describe how they felt supported in the relationship. Of the people or groups identified, participants most frequently reported turning to their friends or friends' families (16%), extended family (9%), mothers (8%), siblings (7%), a romantic significant other (5%), and church or religious people or groups (5%). Participants reported turning to their fathers for support only 1% of the time. Nineteen percent of responses indicated that they turned to no one for additional support in response to their parents' divorce. Participants were additionally asked to name what else they turned to, apart from supportive others, for strength and comfort during their parents' divorce. Participants most frequently reported turning to a spiritual connection (14%), the arts such as music, dancing, singing, writing, drawing (12%), fantasy and escapes such as video games and reading (11%), physical activity and sports (9%), and school or work (7%). Seven percent of responses reflected negative coping methods such as self-harm and promiscuity, and 11% indicated no other source of support.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	PTG	PSS	I-SS	E-SS	IR	P-RC	N-RC	CES	PTSD	Time
Post-traumatic Growth	67.09	24.44	--									
Perceived Social Support	5.52	1.25	.28**	--								
Instrumental Social Support Coping	2.73	.85	.15*†	.35**	--							
Emotional Social Support Coping	2.82	.90	.22**	.49**	.51**	--						
Intrinsic Religiousness	3.10	1.03	-.05	-.10	-.18**	-.1	--					
Positive Religious Coping	1.91	1.12	.44**	.16*	.23**	.20**	-.56**	--				
Negative Religious Coping	1.56	.86	.33**	-.06	.052	.053	-.06	.46**	--			
Centrality of Events	2.54	1.0	-.14*†	.02	-.09	-.17*	0.20	0.20	-.05	--		
PTSD Symptoms	34.15	15.74	.25**	-.20**	.01	.03	-.06	.12	.39**	-.40**	--	
Time Since Divorce	10.06	6.61	.04	.25**	.09	.16*	-.004	.02	-.001	-.01	-.26**	--

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01; † indicates significant variable that became non-significant when analyzed with bootstrapping analyses of 1,000 iterations; PTG = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, PSS = Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, I-SS = COPE Instrumental Social Support Coping Subscale, E-SS = COPE Emotional Social Support Coping Subscale, IR = Age Universal Intrinsic Religiousness Subscale, P-RC = Positive RCOPE Subscale, N-RC = Negative RCOPE Subscale, CES = Centrality of Events Scale, PTSD = PTSD Checklist-Civilian Version

Table 2
Beta Weights of Significant Predictors of PTG

Variable	Beta
Positive Religious Coping	.483
Intrinsic Religiousness	.251
Perceived Social Support	.240
Negative Religious Coping	.141

*All beta weights were significant by t-test with $p < .05$

Table 3
Percent of Responses Indicating Theme Per Question

Q1: How do you feel that your life is different now as a result of your parents' divorce?
N = 429; 149 negative (Neg.); 182 positive (Pos.); 98 neutral (Neut.)

Coded Themes	Neg.	Pos.	Neut.	Coded Themes	Neg.	Pos.	Neut.
1. Changes in relating to others	2%	>1%	>1%	8. Changes to selfhood/identity	2%	8%	2%
2. Changed family relationships (non-parental)	2%	3%	2%	9. Emotional changes/effects	4%	2%	>1%
3. Changed parental relationships	4%	3%	2%	10. Spiritual changes	0%	2%	0%
3-17. Mother specified	>1%	>1%	>1%	11. Changes to Appreciation of Life	>1%	2%	0%
3-18. Father specified	2%	>1%	>1%	12. Economic/Financial changes	2%	>1%	0%
4. Changed view of marriage/Relationship values	6%	5%	4%	13. No changes/too young to remember	>1%	0%	7%
5. Trust issues	6%	>1%	0%	14. Parents are happier/More peaceful	0%	7%	>1%
6. New possibilities/experiences	>1%	4%	>1%	15. Holidays/Big life events effected	3%	>1%	2%
7. Changes to personal strengths/abilities	>1%	2%	0%	16. Other	>1%	2%	3%
				Total:	34%	42%	24%*

Q2: In response to your parents' divorce, was there a certain person or group of people you turned to for support? If so, please describe.
N = 373; 15 negative; 208 positive; 150 neutral

Coded Themes	Neg.	Pos.	Neut.	Coded Themes	Neg.	Pos.	Neut.
17. Mom	>1%	5%	3%	24. Church/religious people or groups	0%	3%	2%
18. Dad	>1%	1%	>1%	25. Therapeutic services/people/groups	0%	2%	>1%
19. Step-parent	0%	>1%	0%	26. School professionals/programs	>1%	1%	>1%
20. Sibling(s)	0%	3%	4%	27. Myself	>1%	>1%	1%
21. Extended Family	0%	5%	4%	28. Method of other's help described	>1%	19%	2%
22. Friends/Friend's families	>1%	10%	6%	29. None	>1%	>1%	19%
23. Significant other	>1%	3%	2%	16. Other	>1%	>1%	3%
				Total:	2%	52%	46%

Q3: Apart from supportive others, what else did you turn to for strength or comfort when dealing with the separation and divorce of your parents? Please describe.
N= 232; 19 negative; 84 positive; 129 neutral

Coded Themes	Neg.	Pos.	Neut.	Coded Themes	Neg.	Pos.	Neut.
30. Arts (music, writing, drawing, poetry, etc)	0%	6%	6%	37. Withdrew from others/became isolated	3%	>1%	1%
31. Pets/play/toys	0%	1%	2%	38. Negative coping methods described	4%	0%	3%
32. Fantasy/escapes (video games, reading)	0%	3%	8%	39. Personal Inner Strength	0%	2%	1%
33. Nature	0%	1%	1%	40. Nothing	0%	>1%	11%
34. School/Employment work	0%	2%	5%	16. Other	>1%	5%	10%
35. Physical Activity (sports, exercise)	0%	5%	4%	25. Therapeutic services/people/groups	>1%	>1%	2%
36. Spiritual connection	>1%	8%	6%	Total:	7%	33%	60%

Q4: Please briefly list and describe at least 3 negative and 3 positive outcomes you see arising in your life as a result of your parents' divorce.
N= 1,011; 505 negative; 496 positive; 10 neutral

Coded Themes	Neg.	Pos.	Neut.	Coded Themes	Neg.	Pos.	Neut.
1. Changes in relating to others	3%	3%	>1%	8. Changes to selfhood/identity	2%	9%	>1%
2. Changed family relationships (non-parental)	5%	4%	0%	9. Emotional changes/effects	7%	2%	0%
3. Changed parental relationships (non-specified)	4%	3%	0%	10. Spiritual changes	>1%	2%	0%
3-17. Mother specified	2%	3%	0%	11. Changes to Appreciation of Life	0%	2%	0%
3-18. Father specified	5%	1%	0%	12. Economic/Financial changes	3%	>1%	0%
4. Changed view of marriage/Relationship values	7%	5%	>1%	13. No changes/too young to remember	0%	0%	>1%
5. Trust issues	4%	>1%	0%	14. Parents are happier/More peaceful	>1%	6%	0%
6. New possibilities/experiences	>1%	5%	0%	15. Holidays/Big life events effected	4%	1%	>1%
7. Changes to personal strengths/abilities	>1%	3%	0%	16. Other	>1%	>1%	>1%
				Total:	48%	51%	1%

Q5: Individuals define spirituality in many different ways. How did your religion, personal faith, or spirituality play a role in managing your parents' divorce?
N= 257; 17 negative; 104 positive; 136 neutral

Coded Themes	Neg.	Pos.	Neut.	Coded Themes	Neg.	Pos.	Neut.
41. No help/role/Never had faith or religion	0%	>1%	37%	47. Doubted religion/lost faith/anger at God	4%	0%	5%
42. Religious community (people) played a role	0%	2%	0%	48. Parent's religion discussed	2%	2%	4%
43. Provided a sense of hope/support/strength	0%	16%	0%	49. Turned to spiritual/meaningful things	0%	5%	>1%
45. God's Plan/Everything happens for a reason	>1%	7%	0%	50. Prayer used	>1%	3%	>1%
46. Effected ability to forgive and accept	0%	2%	0%	16. Other	>1%	4%	5%
				Total:	7%	41%	52%

*The total for each question represents the sum of the percent responses (positive, negative, and neutral) for all coded themes within the question. The percents total 100%, however percentages less than 1% are only denoted as "<1%" in the table.

Participants were asked to list and describe three positive and three negative outcomes they saw arise in their lives as a result of their parents' divorce. Of the positive changes, the most frequent positive outcomes reported were changes to self-hood and identity (18%), parents becoming happier and more peaceful (11%), changed family relationships (10%), changed view of marriage, romantic relationships, and values (9%), new possibilities, opportunities, and experiences (9%), and relating to others (6%). The most frequent negative outcomes reported were changed parental relationships (21%), changed view of marriage, romantic relationships, and values (14%), changed family relationships (10%), emotional effects (13%), trust issues (8%), effects to holidays and big life events (8%), relating to others (7%), economic and financial changes (6%). Of the negative changes to parental relationships 18% were targeted specifically at the mother, 47% were targeted at the father, and 35% were targeted at both parents.

Finally, participants were asked how their religion, personal faith, or spirituality played a role in managing their parents' divorce. Thirty-seven percent of responses expressed that religion and spirituality played no role in managing their parents' divorce. Others reported that their religion or spirituality provided a sense of stability, support, hope and strength (16%), helped them by trusting that God had a plan (7%), or helped them cope through prayer (4%). Nine percent of responses reflected that participants began to doubt their religion, became angry at God, or lost faith due to the divorce.

Chapter Four:

Discussion

The present study sought to develop a better understanding of factors related to posttraumatic growth in young adults who experienced parental divorce. Consistent with Harvey and Fine (2010), findings from this study demonstrate that both themes of pain and growth were present in young adults' accounts of their parents' divorce. Participants found their parents' divorce to be quite distressing with the vast majority of the sample rating the divorce as "moderately" or "extremely stressful". Additionally, more than half of participants indicated that they perceived their parents' divorce as a negative event at the time of the divorce. However, far fewer participants indicated that they still perceived the divorce as a negative event and in the short answer participants reported more positive than negative changes when asked how their lives were different as a result of their parents' divorce. A large portion of the sample also reported that they had sought individual or family counseling in order to deal with their parents' divorce indicating that the event was distressing enough to seek guidance and assistance from a trained mental health professional. The present sample also reported more PTSD symptoms related to their parents' divorce than the sample on which the measure was developed indicating that their parents' divorce was quite distressing (Ruggiero, Ben, Scotti, & Rabalais, 2003). Participants' descriptions of their parents' divorce often illustrated its traumatic nature, as so aptly stated by one respondent, "The whole trajectory for my life changed. Everything about who I am and how I developed as a man was altered by my parent's divorce." Divorce often radically changes children's lives as their familial structure, place

of residency, financial resources, school zone, holiday celebrations, and way of being can be altered in dramatic ways. For many children, this constitutes a trauma.

Posttraumatic growth has been described as going a step beyond resiliency in that individuals actually become stronger than they had previously been (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Findings from the present study support this idea for children of divorce; however, the process appears nuanced. Although the data support the idea of growth after the significant hardship of a parental divorce, themes of continued pain also emerged. Divorce affects millions of US Children and in some situations such as abuse, infidelity, and irreconcilable differences, is unavoidable (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The question then remains, in cases when divorce is required or unavoidable, how can parents, school and mental health professionals help to promote growth and healing for the children involved.

The present study points to the importance of strengthening perceived social supports and religious coping in order to facilitate children's healing following a difficult parental divorce. Participants who reported higher levels of perceived social support, instrumental and emotional social support coping, and positive and negative religious coping were shown to have higher ratings of PTG. Furthermore, participants who reported higher posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms following their parents' divorce and those who viewed the divorce as a more central event to their lives also reported higher levels of PTG, indicating that the more traumatic the divorce was perceived, the more room there was for growth.

Beyond religion and social support, additional themes arose regarding participants' experience of their parents' divorce. The most frequently reported positive

change was participants' strengthening of selfhood and identity. One participant's response illustrates the idea of PTG well as she writes "I believe as a result of the long and drawn-out problems in my family as a result of the divorce, I am a stronger and more grateful person than I would have been if my childhood had been enjoyable/comfortable." Another respondent wrote "I have met people and done things I wouldn't have experienced otherwise. I have learned to work hard and have experienced things that hopefully many people will never have to deal with, but I know it has made me a stronger person." This quote also illustrates a positive theme of new possibilities which 9% of respondents also highlighted. It seems that many respondents felt that in struggling through their parents' divorce they were able to grow as a people, often because they were challenged to have strength in new areas where they may not have needed it before or they learned about aspects of themselves that were only revealed through challenge.

Many participants wrote about difficulty being able to trust others or themselves as a result of their parents' divorce. One quote illustrates this feeling well "I have a lot of difficulties trusting people (and God) because of the ways my parents did not come through on what I was trusting them for." In addition to trust, many respondents wrote about the fear of not being able to avoid their own divorce in the future. Others wrote about how much more prepared they felt to avoid divorce as they now understood even more the importance of remaining married. It seems that trust and fear of future relationship success is one of the areas in which participants feel that damage from the divorce remains and growth is less evident or takes more time. Future research should be

conducted to analyze how to buffer children from feelings of betrayal which may damage their trust relationships.

Social Support

Interestingly, participants' perceptions of their social support – their beliefs about supportive others who they can reach out to in times of trouble – was the only social support variable that retained significant explanatory power in the multiple regression analysis. This suggests that individuals' perceptions of their available supports are more important than the extent to which they actually use social support to cope during a difficult event. This finding was consistent with the literature indicating that people must perceive or recognize support from others in order for it to actually provide them with the felt-benefit of being supported (Haber, Cohen, Lucas, & Baltes, 2007). Participants were asked to list and describe how they felt supported by others during their parents' divorce. Participants reported feeling the most supported by friends and friend's families, extended family members such as grandparents, mothers, siblings, a romantic significant other, and religious people or groups. Some participants also reported seeking help from mental health and school professionals. One female respondent wrote "My guidance counselor in elementary school set up a divorce group for kids. She made a special effort to ensure I coped well...and always was there to help." Participants often described feeling supported by sharing thoughts, being listened to, having their feelings validated. One participant wrote about how she felt supported by adults she turned to in her life saying "I would talk to them about everything, whether I was angry, sad, or relieved. They would listen, and show me my feelings had validity, but help me overcome them." Unfortunately, many participants stated that they had no one else to turn to for support

and a small percentage indicated turning to negative coping methods which were often harmful. One respondent wrote:

There was no particular person or group of people I turned to for support, but I became promiscuous early (at the age of 16) as a form of coping. Sex was my drug until I matured and realized the damage I was inflicting on my ability to form meaningful relationships.

One of the most interesting findings of the present study was the way in which participants conceptualized and wrote about their parents following the divorce. When asked to list negative outcomes of the divorce, the largest percentage of responses indicated disappointing, changed relationships with their parents with the majority of those responses targeted specifically at the father and many fewer negative responses pertaining to the mother. It could be that this disparity is related to which parent the children predominately lived with after the divorce as more than half of this sample lived all or mostly with their mother while a much smaller amount lived all or mostly with their father. However, many respondents also indicated positive changes to parental relationships. One respondent captures this tension well as she wrote “My parents had a very conflict-filled marriage, but since their divorce I’ve been able to develop relationships with both of my parents and see more of their good sides without all their arguing. That said, I still feel very sad and regretful about their divorce.” In two of the short answer questions participants rated highly that their parents were happier, fought less, and were more peaceful, further demonstrating this positive outcome of the divorce.

Religion and Spirituality

In addition to social support, intrinsic religiousness and positive and negative religious coping were found to be factors related to PTG. The bivariate correlation between PTG and intrinsic religiousness was not statistically significant although when other variables were controlled for in the regression analysis, intrinsic religiousness contributed statistically significant variance to PTG. One explanation for this is that positive religious coping, which correlates highly with intrinsic religiousness, may mediate the relationship between intrinsic religiousness and PTG. It is possible that simply considering oneself as intrinsically religious is not a facilitative to PTG as is actually coping with the divorce through religious means. Actively engaging in religious activities such as positive religious coping, religious openness, inclination to deal with existential questions, and religious participation are frequently related to posttraumatic growth (Shaw et al., 2005). In the present study participants often highlighted prayer and believing that God has a plan as factors that helped them grow and heal after their parents' divorce. Interestingly, negative religious coping was also found to play a less powerful but still statistically significant role in PTG. Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) theory of cognitive restructuring may help explain this unexpected correlation. It could be that a parental divorce challenges one's view of God and leads to negative religious coping such as questioning the role of God in one's life. It could be that as one engages in negative religious coping he or she is also processing through his or her negative emotions and thoughts resulting from the trauma leading to cognitive reprocessing and restructuring (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). It is possible then that growth arises when people are able to work through negative religious coping to build a new assumptive

world in which the reality of trauma along with a more nuanced and positive understanding of one's religion or spirituality, is incorporated.

In the short answer responses, many participants wrote that religion played no role for them at all in dealing with their parents' divorce. This indicates that many young adults and children do not use religion and spirituality to any extent when dealing with parental divorce and therefore it will often not serve as an effective aide to the promotion of PTG. In contrast, many others shared that their religious faith, practice or community provided them with a sense of stability, hope, and strength in the midst of their parents' divorce. Prayer was highlighted as a religious activity that helped bring peace in the midst of divorcing parents. Participants often cited the belief that God had a plan or that their suffering was happening for a reason indicating that they could trust in something good beyond their understanding. One participant wrote:

I did not stop having trust but rather directed my trust to God believing he had the situation and future under control. And I was able to feel comfort personally from God through his Word (the Bible) and other people that I believe He brought into my life to help me through the difficulties.

While many participants reported a strengthening of their faith in response to their parents' divorce, others responded with doubt, anger at God, or loss of faith. One writer illustrated this saying, "My mom explained that god would look out for us and that he had a plan for us, but I was always doubtful. I always felt that he wouldn't have let that happen if he really loved me or existed." Religion and spirituality can at times play a negative role for children dealing with parental divorce, particularly if they feel abandoned by a God they trusted, in addition to the loss of their parent's marriage.

Parents and professionals should be sensitive of an individual's spiritual or religious orientation when conceptualizing strategies to help promote healing and growth after a difficult divorce.

Limitations

Inconsistent with the literature, there was no difference in reports of PTG between males and females. The largely female sample may have hindered the ability to detect differences if they existed. Additionally, a large majority of the participants identified as White/European Americans and as such these findings may not generalize as powerfully to individuals from other racial and ethnic groups. Although there are certainly some universal responses to extremely difficult and stressful situations, it is possible that the present sample lacked enough diversity to capture cultural differences in PTG. Likewise, slightly more than half of this sample reported being affiliated with a religious tradition, predominately Christianity. It is possible that these findings would not generalize well to a more secular sample or to individuals from other faith traditions. Finally, this was a retrospective study and as such relied on participants' memory of their parents' divorce. Some participants shared responses indicating that they were "too young to remember". Future investigation of PTG related to parental divorce should attempt a longitudinal design which would be able to capture the process of growth as it is occurring.

Implications for Research and Practice

Future investigation of children's experiences of parental divorce should consider why there is such a disparity between young adults' perceptions of their relationships with their fathers and mothers following the divorce and whether a strengthening of the father relationship could aide in the development of PTG. As perceived social support has

been found to play an important role in PTG following parental divorce, understanding why the father relationship is often so harmed in a divorce and developing interventions to bolster fathers' relationships with their children is crucial. Additionally, the relationship between intrinsic religiousness, positive religious coping, negative religious coping, and PTG should be further investigated. In the present study intrinsic religiousness did not correlate with PTG on its own but was only revealed in the multiple regression analysis suggesting a possible mediating effect. Likewise, a future study should investigate why both positive and negative religious coping are related to PTG as negative religious coping has previously been found to be related to depressive symptoms (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2011). Both prayer and accessing the belief that "God has a good plan" or "everything happens for a reason" were frequently highlighted in the qualitative data as positive and strengthening constructs, future investigation should clarify how these factors help facilitate growth in young adults facing parental divorce. Finally, as the sample for the present study was predominately Christian or non-religious, future studies should attempt to replicate these findings in samples comprised of a majority of participants from other faith backgrounds.

Results from the present study suggest a number of helpful strategies for parents, clinicians, and school professionals seeking to aide children heal and grow after a difficult parental divorce. One of the pivotal findings suggests that even more so than directly using social support to cope, individuals must perceive or feel that support is available to them if needed. Mental health and school professionals should consider creating more divorce support groups for children within the school setting as the few participants who mentioned this type of intervention did so highlighting it as a positive

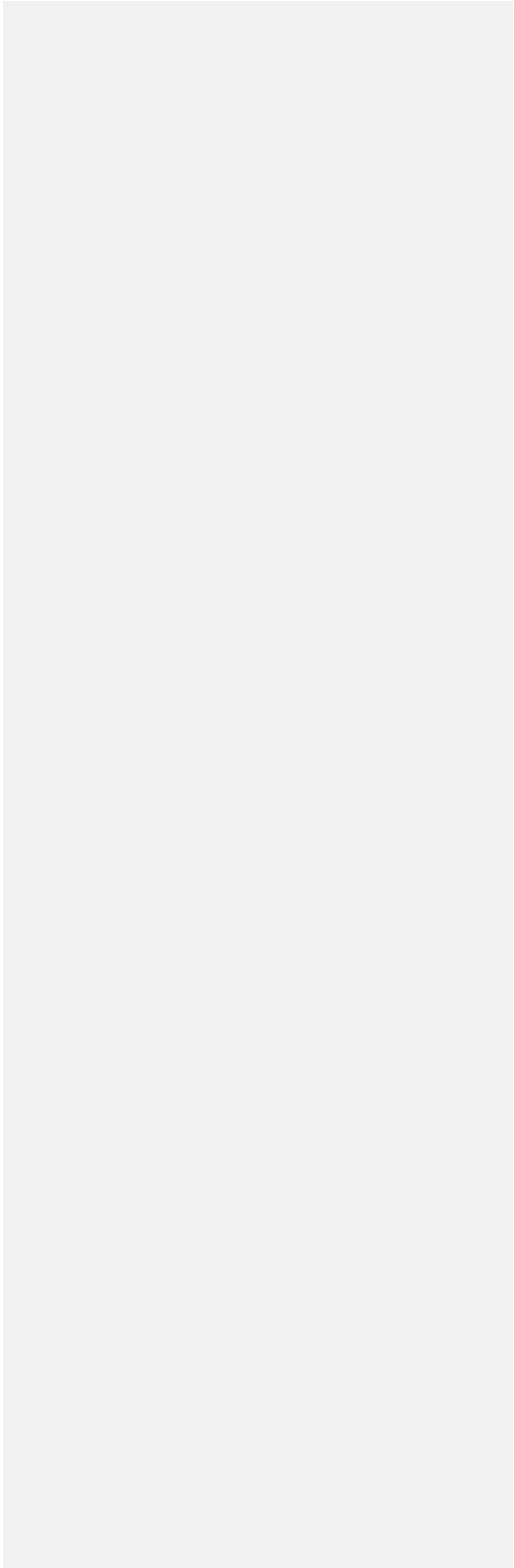
and helpful outlet. This research suggests that when divorcing, parents should invest extra care to ensure that their children have supportive others whom they can turn to in order to discuss their feelings and thoughts about the divorce. Connecting children with supportive others could also help them to feel strengthened by stable social entities in the midst of such drastic parental changes. Parents could encourage their children to talk openly with safe and supportive others such as friends, friend's parents, and extended family members. Giving their children permission to discuss the divorce is an important step so that the children are not hindered from discussing the event by feeling that doing so may be a betrayal to their parents. Additionally, counselors should work to involve fathers in therapy as large portion of responses indicated negative experiences with fathers following divorce. Counselors and school professionals should consider collaboratively developing psychoeducational groups for divorcing parents that would train them in skills such as nonjudgmental listening and validation of feelings as many respondents described how supportive it felt to simply be heard and affirmed. These steps are recommended for both males and females facing parental divorce as no gender differences were found in the present study.

In addition to strengthening supportive relationships adults should also consider strengthening other supports and coping strategies available to their children. Participants often referenced receiving help from a spiritual connection, the arts such as music, dancing, singing, writing, drawing, fantasy and escapes such as video games and reading, school or work, psychical activity and sports. Counselors working with clients from a religious background could help facilitate PTG by engaging in interventions that encourage positive religious coping and clients to feel a stronger connection with God

and his love, care, and plan. Many children facing parental divorce will also engage in negative religious coping wondering if their parents' divorce is a punishment from God or feeling abandoned by God. In these cases, counselors are encouraged to help the child process these often painful thoughts and emotions. The present study suggests that negative religious coping does play a role in PTG and may serve to challenge participant's assumptions about God. As the child is given space to process these thoughts and feelings with a supportive counselor he may begin to build a new assumptive world which incorporates difficulty into his theology and strengthens him to face future challenges with a more nuanced perspective.

The factors leading to human growth in the face of adversity must be examined in order to help individuals flourish in a world that often guarantees suffering at one time or another in the course of a person's life. It appears that perceived social support, instrumental and emotional social support coping, and positive and negative religious coping are important factors for growth for a young adult population managing parental divorce. These findings present an intriguing picture of how young adults can most successfully heal and grow after experiencing the difficulty of parental divorce and can serve mental health professionals and parents assisting to support and strengthen children of divorce.

APPENDICES



Appendix A
Demographic Information

1. How old are you?
2. What is your current year in school (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior, senior)?
3. What is your major of study?
4. How old were you when your parents separated?
5. How old were you when your parents legally divorced?
6. How many years have passed since your parents divorced?
7. Have you ever been in individual or family counseling? If so, how long did you attend? Please describe the experience.
8. What is your race/ethnicity?
9. What is your gender/sex?
 - a. Male/Female/Other
10. Socioeconomic status
 - a. Mother's highest level of educational attainment
 - a. High School/Bachelor's Degree/Master's Degree/Doctorate
 - b. Father's highest level of educational attainment
 - a. High School/Bachelor's Degree/Master's Degree/Doctorate
11. Did you move after the divorce? Please describe the changes in your living situation? (include distance from previous residence, changes in living conditions)
12. Siblings
 - a. Number of full biological siblings
 - b. Number of half siblings

c. Number of step siblings

13. Participant Birth Order

14. Please rate the degree to which you perceive your mother to be a religious person.

- 1 – Very untrue of her
- 2 – Untrue of her
- 3 – Somewhat untrue of her
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Somewhat true of her
- 6 – True of her
- 7 – Very true of her

15. Please rate the degree to which you perceive your father to be a religious person.

- 1 – Very untrue of her
- 2 – Untrue of her
- 3 – Somewhat untrue of her
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Somewhat true of her
- 6 – True of her
- 7 – Very true of her

16. Participant Involvement in Religion

a. Are you affiliated with any religious tradition?

i. Yes/No

b. If so, please select which religion best describes you.

i. Protestant/Catholic/Latter-day Saint/ Jehovah's

Witness/Jewish/Islamic

/Hindu/Buddhist/Baha'i/Taoist/Other_____

17. Who did you live with after the divorce?

18. Please rate the stressfulness of your parent's divorce on a scale of 1-10 with 1

being "not at all stressful", 5 being "moderately stressful", and 10 being
"extremely stressful".

19. Please use the scale below to indicate to what extent you considered your parents' divorce a negative/traumatic event versus a positive/freeing event **at the time of the divorce.**

- 1 - Extremely negative
- 2 - Negative
- 3 - Slightly negative
- 4 - Neutral
- 5 - Slightly Positive
- 6 - Positive
- 7 - Extremely positive

20. Please use the scale below to indicate to what extent you consider your parents' divorce a negative/traumatic event versus a positive/freeing event **now.**

- 1 - Extremely negative
- 2 - Negative
- 3 - Slightly negative
- 4 - Neutral
- 5 - Slightly Positive
- 6 - Positive
- 7 - Extremely positive

Appendix B

Posttraumatic Growth Inventory

(PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996)

Indicate for the statement below the degree to which the change reflected in the question is true in your life as a result of your parents' divorce, using the following scale.

0 = I did not experience this change as a result of my parents' divorce.

1 = I experienced this change to a very small degree as a result of my parents' divorce.

2 = I experienced this change to a small degree as a result of my parents' divorce.

3 = I experienced this change to a moderate degree as a result of my parents' divorce.

4 = I experienced this change to a great degree as a result of my parents' divorce.

5 = I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my parents' divorce.

_____ 1. I changed my priorities about what is important in life. (V)

_____ 2. I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life. (V)

_____ 3. I developed new interests. (II)

_____ 4. I have a greater feeling of self-reliance. (III)

_____ 5. I have a better understanding of spiritual matters. (IV)

_____ 6. I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble. (I)

_____ 7. I established a new path for my life. (II)

_____ 8. I have a greater sense of closeness with others. (I)

_____ 9. I am more willing to express my emotions. (I)

_____ 10. I know better that I can handle difficulties. (III)

_____ 11. I am able to do better things with my life. (II)

_____ 12. I am better able to accept the way things work out. (III)

- _____13. I can better appreciate each day. (V)
- _____14. New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise. (II)
- _____15. I have more compassion for others. (I)
- _____16. I put more effort into my relationships. (I)
- _____17. I am more likely to try to change things which need changing. (II)
- _____18. I have a stronger religious faith. (IV)
- _____19. I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was. (III)
- _____20. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are. (I)
- _____21. I better accept needing others. (I)

Appendix C

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

(MDSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988)

Please rate each statement below indicating the amount to which you believe the statement describes you.

7-point rating scale *1-very strongly disagree* to *7 very strongly agree*

- _____ 1. There is a special person who is around when I am in need.
- _____ 2. There is a special person which whom I can share my joys and sorrows.
- _____ 3. My family really tries to help me.
- _____ 4. I get the emotional help and support I need from my family.
- _____ 5. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.
- _____ 6. My friends really try to help me.
- _____ 7. I can count on my friends when things go wrong.
- _____ 8. I can talk about my problems with my family.
- _____ 9. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.
- _____ 10. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.
- _____ 11. My family is willing to help me make decisions.
- _____ 12. I can talk about my problems with my friends.

Appendix D

COPE

(Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989)

We are interested in how people respond when they confront difficult or stressful events in their lives. There are lots of ways to try to deal with stress. This questionnaire asks you to indicate what you generally do and feel, when you experience stressful events.

Obviously, different events bring out somewhat different responses, but think about what you usually do when you are under a lot of stress. You should treat each item separately from every other item and there are no right or wrong answers. Responses should indicate what you do rather than what "most people" do. Response choices are: (1) "I usually don't do this at all," (2) "I usually do this a little bit," (3) "I usually do this a medium amount," and (4) "I usually do this a lot"

Seeking Social Support-Instrumental

- _____ 1. I ask people who have had similar experiences what they did.
- _____ 2. I try to get advice from someone about what to do.
- _____ 3. I talk to someone to find out more about the situation.
- _____ 4. I talk to someone who could do something concrete about the problem.

Seeking Social Support-Emotional

- _____ 1. I talk to someone about how I feel.
- _____ 2. I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives.
- _____ 3. I discuss my feelings with someone.
- _____ 4. I get sympathy and understanding from someone.

Appendix E

Intrinsic Religiousness Subscale of Age-Universal Intrinsic/Extrinsic Scale-Revised
Scale (AUI/ES-R; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989)

Please indicate to what extent the following statements are true of you using the scale
below.

Items were rated on a 5- point Likert Scale with 1 (“Strongly Agree”) and 5 (“Strongly Disagree”).

- _____ 1. I enjoy reading about my religion.
- _____ 2. It doesn't much matter what I believe so long as I am good. (reversed)
- _____ 3. It is important to me to spend time in private thought and prayer.
- _____ 4. I have often had a strong sense of God's presence.
- _____ 5. I try hard to live my life according to my religious beliefs.
- _____ 6. Although I am religious, I don't let it affect my daily life. (reversed)
- _____ 7. My whole approach to life is based on my religion.
- _____ 8. Although I believe in my religion, many other things are more important in life. (reversed)

Appendix F
Brief Religious-COPE
(Pargament et al., 2011)

Please indicate the extent to which you used the following methods of religious coping in dealing with your parents' divorce.

Items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ("not at all") to 3 ("a great deal").

Positive Religious Coping Subscale Items

- _____1. Looked for a stronger connection with God.
- _____2. Sought God's love and care.
- _____3. Sought help from God in letting go of my anger.
- _____4. Tried to put my plans into action together with God.
- _____5. Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.
- _____6. Asked forgiveness for my sins.
- _____7. Focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems.

Negative Religious Coping Subscale Items

- _____1. Wondered whether God had abandoned me.
- _____2. Felt punished by God for my lack of devotion.
- _____3. Wondered what I did for God to punish me.
- _____4. Questioned God's love for me.
- _____5. Wondered whether my church had abandoned me.
- _____6. Decided the devil made this happen.
- _____7. Questioned the power of God.

Appendix G

The Centrality of Events Scale

(CES; Berntsen & Rubin, 2006)

Please think back upon your parents' divorce and answer the following questions in an honest and sincere way, by circling a number from 1 to 5.

*Items marked with an asterisk are part of the 7-item short form.

Items were rated on a 5 point Likert scale with items ranging from 1 ("totally agree") to 5 ("totally disagree")

1. This event has become a reference point for the way I understand new experiences.
2. I automatically see connections and similarities between this event and experiences in my present life.
- * 3. I feel that this event has become part of my identity.
4. This event can be seen as a symbol or mark of important themes in my life.
5. This event is making my life different from the life of most other people.
- * 6. This event has become a reference point for the way I understand myself and the world.
7. I believe that people who haven't experienced this type of event think differently than I do.
8. This event tells a lot about who I am.
9. I often see connections and similarities between this event and my current relationships with other people.
- *10. I feel that this event has become a central part of my life story.

11. I believe that people who haven't experienced this type of event, have a different way of looking upon themselves than I have.

*12. This event has colored the way I think and feel about other experiences.

13. This event has become a reference point for the way I look upon my future.

14. If I were to weave a carpet of my life, this event would be in the middle with threads going out to many other experiences.

15. My life story can be divided into two main chapters: one is before and one is after this event happened.

*16. This event permanently changed my life.

*17. I often think about the effects this event will have on my future.

*18. This event was a turning point in my life.

19. If this event had not happened to me, I would be a different person today.

20. When I reflect upon my future, I often think back to this event.

Appendix H

PTSD CheckList – Civilian Version

(PCL-C; Weathers, Litz, Herman, Huska, & Keane, 1994)

Below is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes have in response to stressful life experiences. Please read each one carefully, put an “X” in the box to indicate how much you were bothered by that problem in the 6 months following your parents’ divorce.

(1) Not at all

(2) A little bit

(3) Moderately

(4) Quite a bit

(5) Extremely

1. Repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of your parents’ divorce?

2. Repeated, disturbing dreams of your parents’ divorce?

3. Suddenly acting or feeling as if your parents’ divorce were happening again (as if you were reliving it)?

4. Feeling very upset when something reminded you of your parents’ divorce?

5. Having physical reactions (e.g., heart pounding, trouble breathing, or sweating) when something reminded you of your parents’ divorce?

6. Avoid thinking about or talking about your parents’ divorce or avoid having feelings related to it?

7. Avoid activities or situations because they remind you of your parents’ divorce?

8. Trouble remembering important parts of your parents’ divorce?

9. Loss of interest in things that you used to enjoy?
10. Feeling distant or cut off from other people?
11. Feeling emotionally numb or being unable to have loving feelings for those close to you?
12. Feeling as if your future will somehow be cut short?
13. Trouble falling or staying asleep?
14. Feeling irritable or having angry outbursts?
15. Having difficulty concentrating?
16. Being “super alert” or watchful on guard?
17. Feeling jumpy or easily startled?

Appendix I

Open-Ended Questions

1. How do you feel that your life is different now as a result of your parents' divorce?
2. In response to your parents' divorce, was there a certain person or group of people you turned to for support? If so, please describe your relationship with them and how you felt supported by them.
3. Apart from supportive others, what else did you turn to for strength or comfort when dealing with the separation and divorce of your parents? Please describe.
4. Please briefly list and describe at least 3 negative and 3 positive outcomes you see arising in your life as a result of your parents' divorce.
5. Individuals define spirituality in many different ways. How did your religion, personal faith, or spirituality play a role in managing your parents' divorce?

Appendix J: IRB Approval



EXEMPTION NUMBER: 14-X153

To: Sarah Berkey
 From: Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human
 Subjects Justin Buckingham, Member
 Date: Tuesday, May 20, 2014
 RE: Application for Approval of Research Involving the Use of
 Human Participants

Office of Sponsored Programs
 & Research

Towson University
 8000 York Road
 Towson, MD 21252-0001
 t. 410 704-2236
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Thank you for submitting an application for approval of the research titled,
*The Relationship between Social Support, Religiousness, Gender and
 Posttraumatic Growth in Young Adults Following Parental Divorce*

to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants
 (IRB) at Towson University.

Your research is exempt from general Human Participants requirements
 according to 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). No further review of this project is
 required from year to year provided it does not deviate from the submitted
 research design.

If you substantially change your research project or your survey
 instrument, please notify the Board immediately.

We wish you every success in your research project.

CC: C. Schmidt
 File

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	<i>Psi Chi, Psychology Honor Society</i> <i>Member</i> - University of Maryland, College Park	January 2009 -- present
	<i>Living and Learning Scholar's Program</i> <i>Student Advisory Board Member</i> - University of Maryland, College Park	October 2007 – May 2009
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