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Parental Divorce and Family Functioning: Effects on Differentiation Levels of Young Adults

Patrick Johnson
Jill M. Thorngren
Adina J. Smith
Montana State University

This study examined the effect of parental divorce and various dimensions of functioning in the family of origin on young adult development. A total of 813 participants completed the Self-Report Family Inventory, the Differentiation of Self Inventory, and demographic questions. Results indicate that parental divorce and family functioning significantly affect differentiation levels of young adults. Implications of the results for counselors and future researchers are provided.

The number of families affected by divorce has grown tremendously in the past 50 years. Almost 50% of marriages end in divorce in the United States, and 1 million children are affected by their parents' divorce each year (Bureau of the Census, 1992). Although not conclusive, existing literature has found that children from divorced families experience varied effects due to divorce. Children from divorced families, for example, are more likely than children from intact families to have academic problems, exhibit problematic externalizing and internalizing behaviors, be less socially responsible and competent, and have lower self-esteem (Amato & Keith, 1991; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Hetherington, 1989). Furthermore, developmental tasks of adolescence and young adulthood, such as forming intimate relationships, individuating from parents, and increasing social and economic autonomy, seem to be somewhat more arduous for youths from divorced families than those from intact families (Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998; Johnson & Nelson, 1998). These children are also at higher risk for lower levels of school achievement, unemployment, being sexually active at an early age, delinquent behavior, substance abuse, and association with antisocial peers (Amato & Keith, 1991;

Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, & Kiernan, 1995; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

In addition to psychosocial adjustment difficulties, it appears that parent-child relationships are perceived differently by young adults from divorced and intact families. College-age students from divorced families perceive their parental relationships, particularly with fathers, less positively than children from intact families (Fine, Moreland, & Schwebel, 1983; Fine, Worley, & Schwebel, 1986; White, Brinkerhoff, & Booth, 1985), with relationship deficits being stronger for noncustodial than custodial parents (Amato & Booth, 1991). Other research has shown that adult children of divorced parents feel less affection for their parents, have less contact with them, and engage in fewer intergenerational exchanges of assistance than adults from intact families (Amato & Booth, 1991; Booth & Amato, 1994; White, 1992, 1994). In a qualitative study, Bonkowski (1989) indicated that young adults from divorced families have difficulty establishing feelings of trust in their own relationships, continue to mourn the loss of their family unit, have difficulty individuating, and view postdivorce emotional closeness to their parents as burdensome.

Although parental divorce has varied effects on children, family factors seem to moderate the influence of those effects (Amato & Booth, 1991; Johnson & McNeil, 1998; Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1988). For example, when members of divorced families demonstrate warmth, harmony, and cohesion with each other, the differences between the adjustment of children in these families and those in intact families are decreased (Hetherington, 1989). Higher levels of postdivorce family functioning also appear to moderate the emotional cut-offs that have been associated with parental divorce (Johnson & Nelson, 1998; Johnson, Wilkinson, & McNeil, 1995). Furthermore, young adults' perceptions of triangulation and intimidation by their parents appear to be reduced by higher levels of family functioning while feelings of equality between the young adults and their parents are increased

Authors' Note: Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Patrick Johnson, Montana State University, Department of Health and Human Development, 210 Herrick Hall, Bozeman, MT, 59717-3540; e-mail: rjohnson@montana.edu.

(Johnson & McNeil, 1998). Others have identified variables such as frequency of contact with noncustodial parents (Johnson & McNeil, 1998; Kinnaird, 1987), timing of parental divorce (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1991), gender (Booth & Edwards, 1989; Kalter, 1987), and family structure (Aquilino, 1990) that along with family functioning seem to moderate the effects of parental divorce on children.

Thus, the effect of parental divorce and family factors on children is becoming more clear, although research is needed to further assess longer term developmental outcomes for young adults. In addition, although family factors have been shown to moderate the effects of parental divorce, there is a need for a comprehensive assessment of the family variables that might influence developmental task attainment for young adults from divorced families. To these ends, the present study was designed to assess the effect of parental divorce on developmental task attainment for young adults and to assess the effects of multiple family factors for young adults from divorced families. Specifically, the present study tested the following research hypotheses. First, it was expected that young adults from divorced families would exhibit more difficulty with developmental task attainment than would those from intact families. Next, it was expected that specific family factors would moderate the effects of parental divorce. Most notably, higher levels of family functioning were expected to predict higher levels of developmental task attainment for young adults from divorced families. For the present study, the tasks associated with young adult development were conceptualized via intergenerational family theory.

YOUNG ADULT DEVELOPMENT: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Intergenerational family theory offers a broad-based perspective on young adult development. Following Bowen (1976, 1978), Carter and McGoldrick (1989) indicated that the primary developmental task for young adults is to successfully differentiate from their families of origin. According to Bowen, an individual's level of differentiation is largely determined by the degree to which the child is the recipient of the family's projected anxiety, a process with both intrapsychic and interpersonal outcomes for the offspring. Individuals with higher amounts of intrapsychic differentiation are able to separate thoughts from emotions, whereas poorly differentiated individuals become flooded by emotions. Well-differentiated individuals can choose to make thoughtful decisions based on intellect or to follow their "gut-level" emotions or instincts. The ability to make this an active choice versus a reaction to anxiety and emotionality separates differentiated from undifferentiated individuals. Intrapsychic differentiation, then, is characterized by the ability to experience strong affect as well as shift to calm, logical reasoning when circumstances dictate (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998).

Interpersonal differentiation of self refers to the ability to experience intimacy with and independence from others. Differentiation of self in this context includes adhering to strong personal beliefs despite contrary pressure from others and the ability to engage in physical and intimate relationships without endangering one's own sense of identity (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). In contrast to the balance displayed in individuals with higher levels of differentiation, those who are less differentiated are more likely to engage in fused relationships and/or are emotionally cut off when they experience anxiety (Johnson & Waldo, 1998). Fusion has been characterized as the tendency of undifferentiated persons to remain "stuck" in the positions they held in their families of origin, have few firmly held convictions, be dogmatic or compliant, and seek approval above all other goals (Bowen, 1976, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Emotional cutoff, on the other hand, is demarcated by reactive emotional distance, a tendency to deny family importance, and a facade of independence (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998).

Thus, fusion and emotional cutoff are hallmark traits of individuals who did not attain a high level of differentiation from their families of origin. Whether exhibiting dependency or pseudo-independence, these individuals are reactive to anxiety in the environment and are less able to make decisions based on choice and reasoning. People with fusion tendencies will seek refuge in relationships at all costs; those with cutoff tendencies may flee from interconnectedness. Neither type is able to maintain a healthy balance between separateness and togetherness needs, described by Bowen (1976, 1978) as the two basic life forces.

METHOD

Procedures and Participants

Participants were 813 undergraduate student volunteers who were enrolled in classes at a large university in the Rocky Mountain region. After providing written consent, participants completed standardized instruments and demographic questions. The participants included 563 females (69%), 222 males (27%), and 28 (4%) participants who did not identify their gender. Of the participants, 795 provided information on age ($M = 21.26$, $SD = 5.91$). In terms of ethnicity, 805 participants provided information, with 727 (89%) identifying themselves as Caucasian/Anglo Americans, 29 (4%) identifying themselves as Native Americans, 14 (2%) identifying themselves as Asian Americans, 11 (1%) identifying themselves as Hispanic/Latino Americans, 7 (2%) identifying themselves as African Americans, and 17 (2%) identifying themselves as "other." Of the participants, 796 provided information about their parents' marital status, with 584 (73%) indicating that they were from intact families and 212 (27%) indicating that they had parents who were divorced.

The divorced group ($n = 212$) included 53 (25%) males, 152 (71%) females, and 9 (4%) participants who did not identify their gender. The mean age of respondents at the time of their parents' divorce was 8.32, with a standard deviation of 5.52. Regarding family structure, 131 (59%) participants were from single-parent families, 90 (40%) lived with stepfamilies, and 2 (1%) responded as "other." The mean frequency of contact with noncustodial parent during the past year was 27.11 times ($SD = 25.87$).

Instruments

The Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI). The DSI (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) is comprised of 43 items that are rated on a 6-point scale to generate a total differentiation score and four subscale scores. Factor analyses demonstrated support for the four subscales as being "empirically distinct dimensions of a single construct, differentiation of self" (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998, p. 241). The first subscale, Emotional Reactivity, reflects the degree to which a person responds to environmental stimuli with emotional flooding, emotional lability, or hypersensitivity. The second subscale, I Position, reflects a clearly defined sense of self and the ability to thoughtfully adhere to one's convictions when pressured to do otherwise. The third subscale, Emotional Cutoff, reflects feeling threatened by intimacy and feeling excessive vulnerability in relations with others; this vulnerability leads to fears of engulfment and defensive behaviors such as distancing and denial. The fourth subscale, Fusion With Others, reflects emotional overinvolvement with others, including triangulation and overidentification with parents. Higher scores on the DSI reflect higher levels of differentiation (i.e., more total differentiation, less fusion, less reactivity, less cutoff, and more I position).

Skowron and Friedlander (1998) provided information about the psychometric properties of the DSI. Initial construct validity of the DSI was supported as the DSI correlated highly and in the expected direction with a measure of chronic anxiety and with amount and intensity of symptomatic distress. Across several studies, internal consistency coefficients, using Cronbach's alpha, supported moderate to high reliabilities for the DSI total score and each of the four subscales (e.g., DSI = .88, Emotional Reactivity = .88, Emotional Cutoff = .79, Fusion With Others = .70, and I Position = .85). For the present study, internal consistencies were calculated, and the resulting reliability coefficients were .83 for the total DSI scale, .81 for the Emotional Reactivity subscale, .84 for the Emotional Cutoff subscale, .68 for the Fusion subscale, and .78 for the I Position subscale.

... it appears that young adults who experience divorce in their families of origin attain a lower level of differentiation than their counterparts from intact families.

The Self-Report Family Inventory Version II (SFI). The SFI (Beavers & Hampson, 1990) is comprised of 36 items rated on a 5-point scale that assess individuals' perceptions of family competence and style. Factor analyses revealed five factors that measure consistent themes of family life across different samples, from which the subscales for the SFI were developed. The first subscale, Health/Competence, is a global measure of family functioning that assesses themes of happiness, optimism, problem-solving and negotiation skills, family love, strength of adult coalitions, autonomy/individuality emphasis, and blaming/responsibility patterns. The second subscale, Conflict, assesses the level of overt unresolved conflict, fighting, blaming, and arguing.

The third subscale, Cohesion, assesses the level of satisfaction and happiness attained through togetherness and emphasis on family closeness. The fourth subscale, Leadership, assesses the level of strong and consistent patterns of adult leadership in the family. The fifth subscale, Emotional Expressiveness, assesses feelings of closeness, physical and verbal expressions of positive feelings, and the ease with which warmth and caring are expressed by family members.

Beavers and Hampson (1990) provided psychometric information about the SFI. At a 3-month follow-up, test-retest coefficients for each scale were as follows: Health/Competence $r = .84$, Conflict $r = .52$, Cohesion $r = .50$, Leadership $r = .49$, and Expressiveness $r = .79$. Construct validity was generally found to be sufficient for the SFI subscales through moderate correlations with other conceptually similar measures (i.e., Locke-Wallace Marital Satisfaction Scale, FACES II, FACES III, and Family Environment Scale). For the present study, internal consistencies were calculated, and the resulting reliability coefficients were .93 for the Health/Competence subscale, .88 for the Conflict subscale, .78 for the Cohesion subscale, .31 for the Leadership subscale, and .86 for the Expressiveness subscale. Thus, all subscales, except Leadership, exhibited sufficient internal consistency.

RESULTS

To assess differences between young adults from divorced families and those from intact families across the various components of differentiation, MANOVA and univariate follow-ups were calculated. A multivariate F ratio was generated from Wilks's lambda statistic; significant differences between those from divorced families and those from intact families across the four DSI subscales and the total DSI score were found, $F(4, 763) = 5.48, p < .001$. See Table 1 for the

univariate analyses of variance, means, and standard deviations for each DSI subscale and the total DSI score as a function of parental marital status.

To assess the unique effects of select variables (i.e., family health/competence, family structure, frequency of contact with noncustodial parent, age at time of parental divorce, and gender) on differentiation levels of young adults from divorced families, multiple regression analyses were used for each DSI subscale and the total DSI score. Family health/competence significantly predicted all four DSI subscales and the total DSI score such that higher levels of family health predicted higher levels of total differentiation, $F(1, 188) = 4.45, p < .05$; higher levels of I position, $F(1, 197) = 5.98, p < .01$; higher levels of fusion, $F(1, 196) = 28.34, p < .001$; lower levels of emotional cutoff, $F(1, 191) = 19.84, p < .001$; and lower levels of emotional reactivity, $F(1, 195) = 3.01, p < .05$. Gender was significant on three DSI subscales and the total DSI score such that males had higher levels of total differentiation, $F(1, 188) = 5.60, p < .01$; lower levels of fusion, $F(1, 196) = 13.45, p < .001$; higher levels of emotional cutoff, $F(1, 191) = 5.67, p < .01$; and lower levels of emotional reactivity, $F(1, 195) = 14.87, p < .001$, than females. Family structure, frequency of contact with noncustodial parent, and age at time of parental divorce did not significantly predict any of the DSI subscales or the total DSI score.

To assess the unique effects of each family relationship factor that contributes to overall family health (i.e., conflict, cohesion, leadership, and emotional expressiveness) on differentiation levels of young adults from divorced families, multiple regression analyses were used for each DSI subscale and the total DSI score. Conflict significantly predicted three DSI subscales and the total DSI score such that higher levels of conflict predicted lower levels of total differentiation, $F(1, 197) = 15.22, p < .001$; lower levels of I position, $F(1, 206) = 17.97, p < .001$; higher levels of emotional cutoff, $F(1, 200) = 12.26, p < .01$; and higher levels of emotional reactivity, $F(1, 204) = 3.18, p < .05$. Cohesion was significant on one DSI subscale such that higher levels of cohesion predicted lower levels of emotional reactivity, $F(1, 204) = 4.32, p < .05$. Emotional expressiveness was significant on three DSI subscales such that higher levels of expressiveness predicted lower levels of emotional cutoff, $F(1, 200) = 6.18, p < .01$; higher levels of fusion, $F(1, 205) = 15.31, p < .001$; and higher levels of emotional reactivity, $F(1, 204) = 4.24, p < .05$. Leadership did not significantly predict any of the DSI subscales or the total DSI score.

DISCUSSION

Results of the study show that parental divorce has an effect on differentiation levels of young adults. Specifically, results indicate that young adults from divorced families are more emotionally cut off from significant others than are young adults from intact families. This finding provides some

TABLE 1
Univariate Analyses, Means, and Standard Deviations for Each Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI) Subscale and the Total DSI Score as a Function of Parental Marital Status

Variable	Univariate Analyses $F(1, 766)$	Parental Marital Status			
		Intact		Divorced	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Total DSI score	2.76*	161.61	21.14	158.67	23.17
Emotional Cutoff	6.27**	55.29	10.37	53.16	11.13
Fusion	7.78**	23.13	6.86	24.77	7.69
Emotional Reactivity	5.03*	37.33	9.21	35.79	10.53
I Position	0.76	45.77	8.59	45.20	9.20

NOTE: Higher scores indicate more differentiation (i.e., more total differentiation, less emotional cutoff, less fusion, less emotional reactivity, and more I position).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

confirmation of the conclusions drawn by previous researchers (i.e., Johnson & Nelson, 1998; Johnson et al., 1995) who conceptualized the lower levels of intimacy and individuation with parents and significant peers that have been found in young adults from divorced families as being reflective of emotional cutoffs. Results also suggest that young adults from divorced families are more emotionally reactive than are young adults from intact families, supporting previous research that has shown higher levels of reactivity for young adults after parental divorce (Buboltz, Johnson, & Woller, in press). In addition, parental divorce seems to lead to less interpersonal fusion for young adults. Although less fusion is theoretically characteristic of higher levels of differentiation, it may be that young adults who experienced parental divorce remain in a more disengaged interpersonal position rather than risk intimacy and thus appear less fused. This possible conclusion is supported by the lack of intimacy with significant others that young adults from divorced families have exhibited in previous research (Johnson & Nelson, 1998; Johnson et al., 1995). Thus, young adults from divorced families seem to have more difficulty with the developmental tasks associated with attaining a separate sense of self without emotionally and reactively cutting off from significant others.

Results of the study also support previous findings (Amato & Booth, 1991; Johnson & McNeil, 1998) that suggest the quality of family functioning in the family of origin moderates the effects of parental divorce for young adults. Specifically, greater amounts of family health/competence seem to increase overall levels of differentiation, increase levels of I position, decrease levels of emotional cutoff, and decrease levels of emotional reactivity for young adults from divorced families. Thus, whereas parental divorce was found to have a detrimental effect on several indices of differentiation,

greater amounts of family health seem to moderate those effects. Interestingly, higher levels of family health also predicted higher levels of interpersonal fusion for young adults from divorced families. As discussed previously, young adults from divorced families have been found to have lower levels of intimacy with significant others than young adults from intact families; consequently, greater amounts of family health may moderate this tendency and increase interpersonal closeness. It is not clear whether the increase in interpersonal intimacy reaches a dysfunctional level; this will be discussed further in the Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research section.

Results of the study indicate that family structure (i.e., single parent or stepfamilies), frequency of contact with noncustodial parent, and age at time of parental divorce do not affect differentiation levels of young adults from divorced families. Specifically, results suggest that there are no differences between single-parent families and stepfamilies related to young adult development, not an unexpected finding considering that previous research has shown that the type of family structure is less important than the quality of family interactions within a specific structure (Johnson & McNeil, 1998). The lack of significance of frequency of contact with noncustodial parent and age at time of parental divorce, however, is surprising considering that both of these variables have been shown to affect young adult development (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1991; Johnson & McNeil, 1998; Johnson et al., 1995; Kinnaird, 1987). It may be that these variables lose their predictive power in a multivariate analysis when a factor as potent as family health is taken into account.

Results also suggest that gender has an effect on differentiation levels of young adults from divorced families, with men exhibiting higher overall differentiation levels, less fusion, less emotional reactivity, and more emotional cutoffs than women. Previous research has been mixed regarding the effects of gender after parental divorce (Booth & Edwards, 1989; Johnson & McNeil, 1998; Kalter, 1987; Wallerstein, 1985). It is unclear whether the effects found in the present study represent differences based on postdivorce outcomes or on gender differences inherent in the way the theoretical constructs associated with differentiation have been operationalized in the DSI by Skowron and Friedlander (1998). Issues related to the various theoretical constructs discussed in this study will be explored in greater detail in the Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research section.

In addition, results suggest that specific dimensions of family health (i.e., conflict, cohesion, and emotional expressiveness) have unique effects on differentiation levels of young adults from divorced families, although leadership does not seem to have an effect. In support of previous research (Johnson & McNeil, 1998; Johnson et al., 1995), family cohesion appears to reduce emotional reactivity, whereas family conflict seems to have a deleterious effect on overall differentiation levels by increasing levels of emo-

tional cutoff, increasing levels of emotional reactivity, and decreasing levels of I position for young adults from divorced families. Thus, the effects of conflict and cohesion are clear and consistent with expectations. The effects of emotional expressiveness, however, are less consistent. Specifically, higher levels of emotional expressiveness seem to lead to lower levels of emotional cutoff, higher levels of fusion, and higher levels of emotional reactivity for young adults from divorced families. These mixed results may be related to the theoretical operationalization of the emotional expressiveness variable in the SFI (Beavers & Hampson, 1990). Again, issues related to theoretical constructs in this study will be discussed further in the Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research section.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As noted, a possible limitation, which may prove constructive in directing future research, is the operationalization of some of the theoretical constructs used in the study. Specifically, the ways in which conflict, expressiveness, cohesion, and fusion were defined via the assessment measures may have produced conflicting results. In this study, more family expressiveness predicted less emotional cutoff while it also predicted more fusion and more emotional reactivity. These results initially appear contradictory; less cutoff signifies higher levels of differentiation, but fusion and emotional reactivity are associated with lower levels of differentiation. A common assumption in most theories of family counseling is that enhancing expressiveness between family members leads to healthier family functioning; this study only partially supported that assumption. Previous research (Johnson & McNeil, 1998) that used the expressiveness scale of the Family Environment Scale (FES) (Moos & Moos, 1981) indicated that "expressiveness is the most important post-divorce variable for promoting healthy differentiation for young adults" (p. 245). Perusal of questions assessing expressiveness in the FES and SFI suggests a philosophical difference between the two measures. The FES assesses expressiveness with items such as "We tell each other about our personal problems," "Money and paying bills is openly talked about in our family," and "There are a lot of spontaneous discussions in our family." In contrast, the SFI assesses expressiveness with items such as "Our family members touch and hug each other," "Our family is proud of being close," and "Family members easily express warmth and caring toward each other." It appears that the FES views expressiveness as inclusive of a range of emotions and topics including anger and problem solving. The SFI, conversely, views expressiveness as being primarily warm and conflict free. Given this perspective, it may be understandable that those scoring higher on the SFI expressiveness subscale may also exhibit more tendencies toward fusion and emotional reactivity. Additional

research may further illuminate the various definitions of family expressiveness and the corresponding ramifications for individual and family functioning.

Results also indicate that higher levels of cohesion are associated with less emotional reactivity. Thus, cohesion is associated with less emotional reactivity, whereas expressiveness is associated with more emotional reactivity. On the surface, it would appear that cohesion and expressiveness would both lead to similar types of healthy family functioning. As defined by the instruments in this study, however, cohesion led to higher levels of differentiation while expressiveness generally led to lower levels of differentiation. Again, the operational definitions of these two constructs may have had an effect on the results.

In addition, in the present study, conflict in the postdivorce family predicted lower levels of the various components of differentiation. Although this is an expected finding, future research may focus on the definition of conflict and examine the possibility of healthy conflict that may lead to change and growth.

Finally, the construct of fusion warrants further examination. Parental divorce predicted less interpersonal fusion in young adults, although higher levels of family health in postdivorce families predicted more interpersonal fusion. It may be that divorce in general produces less closeness or intimacy, which is construed as less fusion, and that family health moderates this effect, producing what appears to be more fusion. What is not clearly defined is the level at which fusion can be considered unhealthy. Perhaps given the circumstances surrounding divorce, healthier families engage in behaviors that are characteristic of fusion that are in reality effective and necessary coping mechanisms in that context. Neither Bowen's (1976, 1978) original work or Skowron and Friedlander's (1998) subsequent conceptualizations of fusion and differentiation designate an ideal amount of differentiation. Counselors are cautioned against assuming that higher levels of fusion automatically denote a lower level of mental health. Future research warrants investigating those characteristics of fusion that may be considered healthy in certain contextual situations.

Similarly, feminist scholars have frequently criticized Bowen's (1976, 1978) conceptualization of differentiation. The focus on togetherness that is frequently considered a characteristic of many females may be perceived as fusion from Bowen's perspective (Knudson-Martin, 1994). This study indicates that males from divorced families exhibit less fusion and less reactivity than their female counterparts; however, males also exhibited more emotional cutoff. It appears that females and males react differently to parental divorce. What is not evident is at what point each style of coping becomes dysfunctional. Additional research is needed to explore the multiple factors that influence individuals' styles of coping and what determines healthiness or unhealthiness

in each style. This in turn may lead to a reconceptualization of the construct of fusion.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELORS

Despite limitations, results of the study have implications for counselors. In general, counselors are advised to be aware of issues regarding differentiation when working with young adults from divorced families. Broadly speaking, it appears that young adults who experience divorce in their families of origin attain a lower level of differentiation than their counterparts from intact families. As young adults struggle with monumental decisions such as attending college, pursuing career options, and seeking intimate partners, their levels of differentiation may have a significant effect. For example, those who are prone to emotional reactivity may make decisions based almost exclusively on "what feels right" without accessing more objective measures. Another example is that young adults may reactively choose to pursue career or college options as far from home as geographically possible based on a tendency to emotionally cut off versus a well-thought-out and active choice to relocate.

Counselors are encouraged to validate the feeling aspect of their clients' decision-making style and also help their clients explore decisions from more objective stances. Processing the reasons that their clients are making decisions, especially reactive ones, is invaluable in enhancing self-awareness and expanding options in more than one direction.

Differentiation levels also influence issues related to couples. Based on their experiences, young adults from divorced families may either attempt to imitate their parents' choices in mate selection or conversely, choose partners whom they presume to be very different from their parents. If made from a place of emotional reactivity, these decisions represent examples of fusion and cutoff. As partners in these types of relationships are faced with the everyday stresses of couplehood, the anxiety that is created may perpetuate extreme positions of fusion and cutoff, leading to less satisfying marriages. As noted by Skowron (2000), couples who are less reactive, cutoff, or fused with others and are better able to take I positions in relationships experience greater levels of marital satisfaction than those who are less differentiated. Greater differentiation, then, appears to lead to a greater tolerance of the anxiety that is inherent within couple relationships. Numerous counselors have suggested ways to assist clients in increasing their differentiation levels in the context of couples counseling (e.g., Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1986; Framo, 1981; Waldo & Harman, 1993).

If young adults from divorced families choose to have children of their own, many additional issues related to differentiation become salient points for exploration in counseling. Beginning with how the choice is being made to have children, counselors can explore clients' expectations regarding parenting and roles that each parent will take. As differentia-

tion is considered to be a product of multigenerational transmission (Bowen, 1976, 1978), it is important for counselors to work with clients by exploring their family-of-origin experiences. Specifically, counselors may want to discuss with their clients the ways in which their parents' divorce has affected them and to explore which family patterns and roles they hope to perpetuate with their own children and which they hope to alter.

In general, counselors who work with families after or during divorce are encouraged to recognize the effect of divorce on family members and to encourage those behaviors that moderate the effects of divorce. Suggested goals include working with families to decrease the amount of overt conflict and increase cohesion between family members. Counselors may achieve these goals by teaching family members effective conflict resolution skills and assisting families in reorganizing their boundary structures and planning activities among members that recognize changes in boundaries while still enhancing interactions between newly formed subsystems. It is specifically advisable to work with young adults in forming separate but healthy relationships with each of their parents.

In sum, when working with young adults from divorced families, counselors should be particularly aware of tendencies their clients may have toward emotional reactivity and/or emotional cutoff. By promoting behaviors associated with differentiation, counselors can help young adults access both emotional and rational faculties in making thoughtful rather than reactive decisions related to their families of origin, careers, and intimate relationships.

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Patrick Johnson, Ph.D., is an assistant professor and the program leader for the mental health counseling program at the Department of Health and Human Development at Montana State University. He received his doctoral degree in counseling psychology at New Mexico State University.

Jill M. Thorngren, Ph.D., is an assistant professor and the program leader for the marriage and family counseling program at the Department of Health and Human Development at Montana State University. She received her doctoral degree in counseling and counselor education at Idaho State University.

Adina J. Smith, Ph.D., is an assistant professor and the director of the Human Development Clinic at the Department of Health and Human Development at Montana State University. She received her doctoral degree in clinical psychology at the University of Georgia.

MISTER BOFFO



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