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## An Analysis of the Relationship Between Coping Strategies of Adolescents and Parental Marital Status

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
COPING STRATEGIES OF ADOLESCENTS AND  
PARENTAL MARITAL STATUS

SHERI MORRISON, B.S.

An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate  
School of Lindenwood University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts

1999

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between adolescent coping strategies and the marital status of the adolescent's parents. The 88 subjects in this study were all students from the same suburban St. Louis County high school. The subjects ranged in age from 15 to 19 years of age. The participants were administered the Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experience (A-COPE). It was determined that there was no significant difference between adolescents from divorced and nondivorced families in nine of the twelve subscales of the A-COPE. Three subscales, however, did reveal a significant difference between adolescents from divorced and nondivorced families. The three subscales, seeking diversions, investing in close friends, and seeking professional support showed that the adolescents from divorced families utilize these coping strategies more than adolescents from nondivorced families.

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COPING STRATEGIES OF ADOLESCENTS AND  
PARENTAL MARITAL STATUS

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A Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Lindenwood University in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts

1999

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my husband and best friend, Ken, who has been such a great source of strength and support to me, without whom I may have never completed this seemingly insurmountable challenge. He has reminded me constantly how important my dreams are and that I can accomplish anything I set my mind to. This is also dedicated to my wonderfully supportive family and friends who have encouraged me and believed in me all the way. Mom, Dad, Sandi, Ann, and everyone else, thank you so much for believing in me, listening to me, and for pushing for me to finish. You have all been wonderful. Liz and Scott, thank you both for all you did for me to help me get my sample for this study. Without you two, this paper would never have been completed. This paper is dedicated to all you wonderful people.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Divorce rates in the United States continue to occur at epidemic rates. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1993) defines divorce as the action or instance of legally dissolving a marriage, as well as the termination of an existing relationship or union. What this definition fails to recognize is the number of people involved in the process of divorce. Not only are the two adult partners of the marriage affected, but any children who are a part of the family are also very much affected by the divorce of the parents.

The U.S Census Bureau (as cited in O'Leary, Franzoni, Brack, & Zirps, 1996) reported that in 1990, 1.2 million couples divorced with 1,045,750 minor children directly involved in this process. Approximately half of all children born since 1970 will spend an average of six years in a single parent home, most often with the mother (Kurtz, 1996).

The divorce process, while causing much adjustment and stress to the adults involved, can also lead to the same consequences for the children and adolescents who are involved in the process. Unfortunately for the child or adolescent, the choice to divorce is a decision made by the parents, but the child is directly and greatly affected by the situation. Because the parents are often preoccupied with adjusting to a new life as a single parent, the process of the child's adjustment is often one that the child sometimes must face alone.

Adolescence is defined as the period of life from puberty to maturity terminating legally at the age of majority (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1993). Adolescence is also a time that is characterized by many different changes for the adolescent. Adolescence is characterized by many physical changes within the adolescent, major cognitive and emotional changes, new sexual awareness changes, and new sensitivity to peer relations (Newman & Newman, 1995).

Therefore, an adolescent is going through many physical, psychological, and emotional changes regardless of the marital status of the parents. However, marital disruption of the parents represents an important series of stressful events that result in major domestic reorganization for the family (Kurtz, 1995). These familial changes can add even more stress to the life of the adolescent.

The divorce process restructures the living arrangements of the family, changes the family's lifestyle and rules, and may alter the relationships of the individual members of the family. After experiencing a divorce in the family, children and adolescents have demonstrated a decline in parental evaluation, self-evaluation, and self-esteem (Kurtz, 1994).

When an adolescent is faced with the changes that occur during adolescence without having a solid support system in place, this time can be extremely difficult and challenging for the adolescent. The adolescent

must learn to deal with these experiences by using the coping styles and strategies he or she has developed.

Kurtz (1994) defines coping as the mediation between stress and well being. Lazarus and Folkman (as cited in Mellins, Gatz, and Baker, 1996, p. 721 & Lengua & Sandler, 1996, p. 682) define coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person".

Coping resources are the mechanisms that influence resilience, which may be internal or external, but are comprised of psychosocial factors. Coping resources consist of beliefs, attitudes, and self-perceptions that are routinely used by individuals to deal with events in their lives (Kurtz, 1994). Coping styles are derived from underlying personality traits that make individuals predisposed to respond to situations and experiences in a predictable manner across circumstances (Kurtz, 1994).

Research has shown that children and adolescents from divorced families have significantly less coping styles than their peers from nondivorced families do. These children and adolescents are more likely to employ a rigid style of coping in school, and across contexts, than their counterparts from nondivorced families (Kurtz, 1994).

### Statement of purpose

According to Gonzalez et al. (1995), very few studies have been done to examine the effects of divorce on adolescents. The purpose of this current study is to examine the differences in coping strategies of adolescents from divorced as compared to adolescents from nondivorced families.

### Hypotheses

Adolescents from divorced families will have different coping patterns than adolescents from nondivorced families.

The null hypothesis for this study is that there is no significant difference in coping patterns used by adolescents from divorced and nondivorced families.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

#### Adolescence

Adolescence is a period of human development, which is characterized by a complex set of developmental tasks or demands which will take the adolescent from childhood into adulthood (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987). Adolescence is also viewed as a transitional period, full of rapid changes, and often full of conflict and turmoil (Wagner, 1996). Even in the most stable and supportive environment, adolescence is a period of change, transition, and challenge (Steward et al., 1998).

Newman and Newman (1995) point out that Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory views adolescence as one, single stage with the central conflict being identity versus identity confusion. However, according to Newman and Newman (1995) Erikson's theory encompasses too broad of an age range and break down adolescence into two stages, early adolescence and later adolescence. Early adolescence, approximately ages eleven through eighteen, begins with the onset of puberty and ends with graduation from high school.

Adolescents undergo many changes during this stage. According to Newman and Newman (1995) adolescents undergo the physiological changes associated with puberty, as well as a sexual awakening. Adolescents are also beginning the integration of increased cognitive capacity through new life experiences. They are achieving expectations of

increasing independence from parents and the family, completing academic requirements. Adolescents are developing appropriate social roles with same and opposite sex peers and often experience a heightened sensitivity to peer relations. Adolescents are also choosing and planning for future career plans and occupations, and evolving a set of values to guide the future adult roles (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987).

Because peer groups become so important at this time, Newman and Newman (1995) call the psychosocial crisis of this stage group identity versus alienation. Young adolescents resolve questions about their connections to their peer groups before they create individual identities (Newman & Newman, 1995).

Erikson (as cited in Kidwell, Dunham, Bacho, Pastorino, and Portes, 1995) points out that exploration is another key element in the life of the adolescent. In the transitional period, the adolescent is working to remake the personal identity, which is dependent upon exploration (Kidwell et al., 1995). According to Erikson (as cited in Kidwell et al., 1995), the adolescent often experiences subjective discomfort, confusion, mood swings, ego defenses, impulsivity, acting out, and heightened physical and somatic complaints during this transitional period of exploration.

Other elements of personal identity are also forged at this time, as well as elements of other subsequent orientations, including generativity, integrity, intimacy, and immortality (Newman & Newman, 1995). This is

also a time when the adolescent may rework and pull together his/her earlier psychosocial orientations as he/she engages in more complex, demanding, and confusing environments (Newman & Newman, 1995). During adolescence, individuals are confronted with the necessity of effectively managing the psychological, emotional, and behavioral adjustments to physiological changes and the taking on of new roles with the family, high school setting, and within the peer group (Steward et al., 1998).

In addition, Seiffge-Krenke (1993) points out that adolescence is a period in which the adolescent is confronted with a dramatic change in body, as well as with a series of complex and inter-related developmental tasks. Such developmental tasks include autonomy from parents, establishing relationships, and developing an occupational identity.

Early adolescents are also beginning to think about the world in new and different ways. Thought patterns are starting to become more abstract during this period. Adolescents are starting to think about more than one issue at once, instead of concentrating on one issue at a time as was done during childhood.

According to Newman and Newman (1995) another important factor during this time is that thinking is becoming more reflective as the adolescent becomes aware of his/her thoughts and knowledge. Adolescents are now able to think about and generate hypotheses about events that they have never perceived. Jean Piaget (as cited in Newman

& Newman, 1995) described these cognitive capacities as formal operations. According to Lerner, Lerner, and Tubman (as cited in Steward et al., 1998) the potential for a healthy adaptation is considerably heightened due to sociocultural and developmental demands for the adolescent to think about the future and what role he or she might play in the general social structure.

Formal operational thought is the stage into which a child in the concrete operations stage progresses. In this transition from concrete to formal operations, thoughts are governed more by logical principles than by perceptions and experiences (Newman & Newman, 1995). The adolescent is able to formulate a hypothesis to explain an event and then follow the logic that is implied.

Most individuals make it through adolescence without significant difficulty. According to Earls (as cited in Seiffge-Krenke, 1993) prevalence rates for psychological problems in adolescence are not higher compared to other age groups, besides symptomatology which is clearly age- and gender-specific.

The mental health of adolescents is directly affected by how they cope with normative demands placed on them. Non-normative stressors, such as critical life events like a divorce in the family, can add to the normal developmental stress of the adolescent (Seiffge-Krenke, 1993).



## Divorce Trends

The Statistical Abstract of the United States (1997) reports that there were only 3.5 divorces per 100,000 marriages in 1970. The divorce rate in the United States in 1990 rose to 4.7 per 100,000 marriages (Lester, 1996). Further, this divorce rate has continually risen over the past 150 years, with the only drop in this rate occurring during the Great Depression. In addition, the United States continues to have the highest divorce rate in the industrialized world (Lester, 1996).

As these high numbers of divorces would indicate, there are many children and adolescents affected by the divorce of their parents. Lengua and Sandler (1996) state that divorce is a significant stressor, which affects at least one million children and adolescents every year.

According to the Kids Count Data Book (1997), single-parent families increased from 22% in 1985 to 26% in 1994. Every state except Utah reported an increase in single-parent families, with Minnesota and West Virginia having an increase of more than 50% (Kids Count Data Book, 1997).

Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan, and Anderson (as cited in Pagani-Kurtz & Derevensky, 1997) state that an estimated 45 percent of all children born since 1970 will spend an average of six years in a single-parent home as a result of divorce. Dubow, Schmidt, McBride, Edwards, and Merk (1993) state that it is estimated that 40% to 50% of the children born in the 1980s will spend some length of time in a single-parent family

as the direct result of divorce. Bynum and Durm (1996) indicate that if current trends prevail, less than 50% of children born in the 1990s will spend their childhood living in the home with both parents.

### Effects of Divorce

Mutchler, Hunt, Koopman, and Mutchler (1991) state that divorce has the potential to be a negative stressor on children and adolescents. There are many changes that occur within a family when a divorce occurs. Children from divorced families often have to deal with many issues that nondivorced families do not.

One such issue facing children and adolescents growing up in single-parent families is that they often do not have the same economic or human resources available as families with two parents. Additionally, only one-third of mother-lead families received child support or alimony from the father in 1994, (Kids Count Data Book, 1997). This loss of income would indicate that these children and adolescents are often forced to give up things that they may have taken for granted previously, such as involvement in activities or groups that cost money, as a result of the divorce.

In addition, Seiffge-Krenke (1993) and Kurtz (1995) point out that divorce can also create a change in life conditions, such as a new family structure or restructuring of living arrangements due to divorce. With this new structure or restructuring also comes changes in lifestyle for the adolescent, as well as changes in domestic rules, and family relationships

(Kurtz, 1995). These changes may lead to a cumulation of minor and major events, which may be perceived as stressful to the adolescent.

It is also common for some adolescents to assume adult roles prematurely as they begin to support a distraught or overworked parent. Others withdraw from the situation by literally running away from home because they are unable to deal with the situation (Schwartz, 1992).

Lengua, Wolchik, and Braver (1995) state that children from divorced families often display greater adjustment problems, such as anxiety, depression, noncompliance, aggression and academic difficulty than adolescents from nondivorced families. Additionally, parental divorce is often associated with negative outcomes in the areas of academic achievement, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-esteem, and social relations (Amato, 1991; Howell, Portes, & Brown, 1997).

Another significant effect of divorce on children and adolescents is a significant loss of time spent with one or both parents. It is assumed that with the divorce one parent will move out of the home, which will greatly reduce the amount of time spent with the parent living outside of the home. It is also likely that the mother, if not already working prior to the divorce, will need to work to earn money to support the family. This loss of time and interaction with one or both parents may lead to negative consequences for the child or adolescent. For example, Palosaari, Aro, and Laippala (1996) found in their study that adolescent girls from

divorced families had lower self-esteem and more often a more distant relationship with the father than girls in nondivorced families.

Further, in divorced families, lack of closeness with the father seemed to significantly effect depression in girls, although it did not have a negative influence on boys in the same group (Palosaari et al., 1996). Wallerstein and Corbin (as cited in Palosaari & Aro, 1995) reported that girls with a background of parental divorce had difficulties in opposite-sex relationships and some had fears of being abandoned like their mothers had been.

Pagani-Kurtz and Derevensky (1997) state that the importance of involvement with the noncustodial parent is based upon the premise that a child's adjustment is enhanced by maintaining stable family ties during family transition and that relations with both parents seem to be equally important mediators of a child's postdivorce outcome.

Divorce often places a series of stressors on children and adolescents, which may require major coping demands, such as moving, loss of material possessions, interparental conflict, bad-mouthing by one or both parents, and missed visits by the noncustodial parent (Lengua & Sandler, 1996; Sheets, Sandler, & West, 1996; Sandler, Tein, and West, 1994). Additional stressors could include school changes, which would result in separation from friends, and alienating custody disputes (Mechanic & Hansell, 1989). For an adolescent who is attempting to

define himself/herself through social roles, separation from friends would become a major stressor.

Mechanic and Hansell (1989) point out that the influences of stressors associated with divorce most likely will diminish over time as the family reestablishes itself, but long-term effects can persist for some time for some children and adolescents. The strategies these children use to help cope with these stressors in their lives may impact their long-term psychological functioning and ultimate well being.

According to Bynum and Durm (1996), children usually do not "recover" after divorce. In fact, they state, divorce and the disruption done to the family often have lasting psychological effects on the children.

Aseltine (1996) adds that parental divorce has been linked to adolescent depression and may pose serious threats to the adolescent's well being. Possible reasons for this could include persistent family conflict and economic hardships on the family (Aseltine, 1996).

These children of divorce often experience significant emotional wounds that may remain an issue throughout their lives. Tasker (1996) points out that adolescents from divorced families report an earlier age of intercourse and a higher number of sexual partners and also cohabit or marry earlier than their peers from nondivorced families. Amato and Keith (as cited in Amato, 1991) state that when children from divorced families move into adulthood, they have poorer psychological adjustment, lower

socioeconomic attainment, and greater marital instability than children from nondivorced families.

On the other hand, Lengua, Wolchik, and Braver (1995), Schwartz (1992), and Silitsky (1996) point out the divorce clearly does not have negative or harmful effects on all children. Some factors that seem to explain the differences in post-divorce adjustment include age at the time of the divorce, gender, and the impact of the divorce on the child's self-concept. These are variables that Gonzalez et al. (1995) refer to as child-related variables. Other variables could include custody arrangements, the relationship between the residential parent and the child, a continuing relationship with the noncustodial parent, family support, and parental remarriage. These are variables Gonzalez et al. (1995) refer to as process-related variables.

Other factors, which would affect an adolescent's adjustment to divorce, might include changes in the standard of living, stability or instability in the environment, and parents' and children's social support networks. Additionally, adjustment to parental divorce can vary according to the family's functioning before, during, and after the divorce, parental adjustment to the divorce, conflict between the parents pre- and post-divorce, and the coping resources of the child, (Lengua et al., 1995; Schwartz, 1992; Silitsky, 1996; Howell, Portes, & Brown, 1997). Some other factors which may affect the response to divorce vary by individual

resiliency characteristics, and the availability of emotional support for the child (Schwartz, 1992).

Lengua et al. (1995) also point out that locus of control is an important factor in post-divorce adjustment of children. According to Kurdek (as cited in Lengua et al., 1995) an internal locus of control is related to better adjustment than is holding an external locus of control and an internal locus of control acts as a mediator of children's post-divorce adjustment.

According to Kurtz (1995), adjustment to divorce is enhanced when parents are nurturing, consistent with rules and expectations, authoritative in parenting style, and make reasonable maturity demands. Often, however, many single parents expect the children to assume more responsibility than do parents from nondivorced families (Kurtz, 1995).

### Coping

Coping is defined by Lazarus and Folkman (as cited in Kliwer & Sandler, 1993; Compas, 1987; and Mellins, Gatz, & Baker, 1996) as the cognitive and behavioral strategies and efforts individuals use to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are perceived as stressful to the individual. Compas (1987) also notes the broad definition of coping as all responses to stressful events or episodes. \_\_\_

The function of coping is to protect the individual from negative physical or psychological consequences (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987) and to act on the stressor as well as to regulate emotional states

associated with or resulting from the stressor (Compas, 1987). Tyler (as cited in Patterson & McCubbin, 1987) states that coping behavior has been viewed as an important component of psychosocial competence by which an adolescent is able to balance and manage the developmental tasks of the life stage of adolescence.

According to Patterson and McCubbin (1987), the coping process is especially important in adolescence because the young person is confronted with many stressors for the first time in life and has not established a repertoire of coping responses from which to draw. As the adolescent is able to integrate his or her expanding cognitive capacities, from concrete to formal operations, with the energy of the sexual impulse that is emerging during this period, social and emotional development occur. The coping style that emerges from these efforts during adolescence has long-term consequences that shape the coping style the adolescent will carry into adulthood.

Lazarus and Folkman (as cited in Lengua & Sandler, 1996) distinguish coping from personality characteristics of each individual, which include general beliefs, expectancies, and characteristic response tendencies across situations. Coping strategies have been defined by Pledge (as cited in O'Leary et al., 1996) as the way a person responds to a stressful life situation, with strategies that vary with each individual and across life situations.



These coping strategies can vary in relationship to the individual's social constraints or support, the presence or absence of a support network, such as friends and family, economic situations, educational background, and continued contact with either or both parents (O'leary et al., 1996). Mellins, Gatz, and Baker (1996) state that studies have suggested that coping is an important protective factor for children and adolescents encountering stress, and assessment of coping skills and help predict future psychological adjustment.

According to Patterson and McCubbin (1987) coping functions can be categorized three different ways. First, coping efforts might involve direct action to eliminate or reduce demands and/or to increase resources for managing the demands, which is called problem-focused coping. Second, coping might be aimed at redefining demands to make them more manageable, which is known as appraisal-focused coping. Third, coping might be directed at managing the tension that is felt as a result of experiencing demands, which is known as emotion-focused coping.

According to Parkes (as cited in Lengua & Sandler, 1996), adolescents with an internal locus of control are more likely to use problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies that match the controllability or the situation at hand than do adolescents with an external locus of control. Additionally, a stable characteristic of adolescents, which may influence the use of different coping strategies, is self-regulation (Lengua & Sandler, 1996). Self-regulation is defined by Dodge (as cited in

Lengua & Sandler, 1996) as the means by which an individual modulates, activates, or coordinates emotional arousal and behavioral expressions of arousal.

Lengua and Sandler (1996) categorize coping into two general categories, active and avoidant strategies. Active strategies include cognitive attempts to change ways of thinking about the problem and behavioral attempts to resolve events by dealing directly with the problem. Avoidant strategies include cognitive attempts to deny or minimize threat and behavioral attempts to get away from or avoid confronting the situations (Lengua & Sandler, 1996).

Coping is often thought of as an ideal way for an individual to handle problems by reaching out and within available resources to deal with difficulties. However, coping can also cause the individual more strain in his/her life.

Patterson and McCubbin (1987) state that adolescents may adopt coping behaviors, which propel them into other stressful circumstances, and could then add to their already existing problems or responsibilities and difficulties. For example, an adolescent may attempt to run away from a problem by turning to drugs as a way to relax or getting involved in groups or relationships which involve smoking cigarettes or drugs, drinking alcohol, having sex, or doing illegal drugs.

It seems that adolescents acquire coping styles and behaviors from four different sources (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987). First, these styles

and behaviors can be acquired from previous personal experience in handling similar situations. The second means of acquisition is through vicarious experience associated with observing the success or failure of others, especially family members and friends. Third, these styles and behaviors may be learned through perceptions of his/her own physiology and inferences that are made about his/her vulnerability. Finally, acquisition may occur through persuasion, especially by parents, peers, and significant others (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987).

Patterson and McCubbin (1987) state that from the Double ABCX model, the stimulus for acquiring new coping responses is the experiencing of new kinds of demands and/or an increased number of demands for which the adolescent's existing repertoire of coping responses is no longer effective. Therefore, the adolescent must develop or acquire new responses to handle problems and challenges.

### Theories of Coping

There are many theories from which coping has been considered. Kurtz (1995) points out that researchers have increasingly used Minuchin's family systems perspective within the context of stress and coping theory to conceptualize the relationship between family processes and children's adaptation to life changes. According to Minuchin (as cited in Kurtz, 1995, p. 91), this theory states that the family must be looked at "as an organized system and the individual as a contributing member, part of the process that creates and maintains the patterns that regulate

behavior". This theory is based on the idea that looking at the impact of parental factors on the child's coping will maximize the validity of clinical insights and possible interventions (Kurtz, 1995).

Kurtz (1995) also states that within this theory is the idea that extra stresses on the family could lead to poor parental perceptions and child-rearing practices, which could in turn increase the probability of maladaptation in the child. Therefore, a cycle is set where ineffective parental coping strategies have a negative effect on the parent-child relationship, which then increases the child's risk of developmental disruption or delay (Kurtz, 1995).

Moos and Billings (as cited in Patterson & McCubbin, 1987) emphasized five other perspectives from which coping has been considered. First, the psychoanalytic perspective, which emphasizes ego processes to resolve conflicts between impulses and reality. Second is the life cycle perspective, where successful mastery of developmental transitions increases coping resources, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, a sense of mastery and internal control. Third are the evolutionary and behavior modification perspective, which emphasizes problem-solving strategies that lead to survival of the species and a sense of self-efficacy. Fourth are the cultural and social-ecological perspectives, which emphasize coping as adaptation to the conditions of the physical and cultural environment. Finally, the integrative perspective, which views

coping as one aspect of capabilities which can add to or diminish demands from life events and strains.

The integrative process views coping as one of four components that interact and influence adolescent development and adaptation. The four components, demands, resources, definitions/meaning, and coping have been incorporated into the Double ABCX Model of Family Adaptation (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987).

Patterson and McCubbin (1987) explain the Double ABCX Model of Family Adaptation as the adolescent as one member, or system, within a larger context of nested systems, which include individual family members who comprise a family system which is within the community, or larger system. Each of the three levels of the system, individual, family, and community, is characterized by demands, stressors or strains, and capabilities, or resources, definitions, and coping behaviors. Each of these systems, or units, attempts to achieve adaptation through reciprocal relationships where the demands of one unit are met by the capabilities of another to achieve a balance in functioning (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987).

Patterson and McCubbin (1987) state that the balance in functioning is achieved when there is minimal discrepancy between the demands and capabilities for meeting these demands. For the adolescent, adaptation is achieved by fitting within the family and within the community simultaneously.

An adolescent-to-family fit is achieved through reciprocal relationships, where some adolescent needs are met by family capabilities, such as encouragement for the adolescent's need for individuation. Some family needs are also met by an adolescent family member, such as help with chores around the house or participating in family activities (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987). Adolescent stress may come about when an adolescent's needs exceed the family's existing or acquired capabilities for meeting those demands, which results in an imbalance (McCubbin, Needle, & Wilson, 1985).

This same fit is also sought between the adolescent and the community through reciprocal relationships where adolescent capabilities are used to meet community demands and community capabilities available for the adolescent needs. Important resources at the community level to promote adolescent individuation and identity development include peer relationships, school relationships, and feeling an important part of a social network of friends (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987). However, these same relationships which are resources to a developing adolescent may also place demands on this individual, which may be to smoke, drink, or use drugs (McCubbin et al., 1985).

Throughout this development process, adolescents are often dealing with an ever-changing set of demands, which are coming from their own development, as well as the development of other family members, the family unit, and the community. According to Patterson and

McCubbin (1987), there are two types of demands: stressors and strains. Patterson and McCubbin (1987) define stressors as events that occur at a distinct point in time and call for change, such as an adolescent getting a driver's license or having a car accident. Strains are the unresolved hardships of prior stressors, such as financial hardship, or the inherent tensions of an ongoing role, such as being the child of rigid parents (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987).

According to Patterson and McCubbin (1987) and McCubbin et al. (1985), resources are traits, abilities, or means, which are used to meet demands. Personal resources could include knowledge, skills, personality traits, emotional and physical health, and self-esteem. Family system resources could include cohesion, flexibility, organization, good parent-adolescent communication, and conflict resolution. At the community level, resources could include medical and educational services and social support networks (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987).

The adolescent's pool of resources will change in response to the nature of the demands. Some resources may deplete over time and some are only acquired in response to specific demands or in response to developmental growth (McCubbin et al., 1985).

In the Double ABCX model, a coping behavior is defined as a specific cognitive and/or behavioral response of an individual or a group of individuals to reduce or manage demands (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987; McCubbin et al., 1985). Therefore, coping is what one does, rather than

what one has. Coping, then, often involves using available resources to meet demands or it could involve developing or obtaining new resources. Coping, in the Double ABCX model, is a bridging concept, which involves the interaction of resources and definitions in response to a pile-up of demands (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987).

### Coping with divorce

According to Compas, Banez, Malcarne, and Worsham (as cited in Kurtz, 1994), a direct link has been established between stressful life events and disorders of a psychological or physiological nature in both children and adults. Dubow et al. (1993) point out that children and adolescents who experience stressful life events and situations, such as divorce, are at risk for behavioral and emotional difficulties and problems.

According to Johnson (as cited in Mellins, Gatz, and Baker, 1996), a number of studies have revealed a significant relationship between stressful life events and psychological maladjustment in children and adolescents. Sheets, Sandler, and West (1996) point out that evidence demonstrates that parental divorce may lead to psychological adjustment problems in children and adolescents.

Kurtz (1994) reports that children from divorced families often experience acute negative reactions in post-divorce adaptation. The nature of the children's vulnerability will vary based on individual, parental, and contextual factors. Approximately one third of children of divorce report long-term psychological difficulties. Children and adolescents from



divorced families also have lower achievement scores and less school success than do children and adolescents from intact families (Kurtz, 1994). Additionally, Amato and Keith (as cited in Lengua & Sandler, 1996) point out that evidence shows children and adolescents from divorced families demonstrate greater adjustment problems than children from nondivorced families.

Jenkins and Smith (1993) note that parental divorce is often associated with an increased risk of emotional and behavioral problems in children and adolescents. A study conducted by Wallerstein (as cited in Jenkins and Smith, 1993) found that children who experienced parental divorce in their teenage years were more likely to display antisocial behaviors and difficulties in interpersonal relationships into adulthood.

According to Emery (as cited in Jenkins & Smith, 1993) these same children of divorce often demonstrate externalizing of problems, rather than internalizing problems. Generally, boys are more likely than girls to externalize problems.

Schwartz (1992) points out older elementary school children and adolescents tend to be more capable of dealing with the realities of divorce. However, these same children often experience anxiety and hostility regarding the divorce and the life changes it brings about and boys tend to act out, while girls tend to withdraw.

Adolescents are aware that divorce is the result of parental conflict and, because they are in the formal operations stage, are able to

hypothesize possible outcomes of the event in a more realistic way than younger children still in the concrete operations stage (Schwartz, 1992). Adolescents are able to manipulate several variables in the divorce situation and they are able to perceive multiple, logical relationships. In addition, children and adolescents who have experienced parental divorce are more likely to divorce themselves (Jenkins & Smith, 1993).

According to Jenkins and Smith (1993) the more accepting children are of the divorce of their parents, the better adjustment these children showed two years after the divorce. Garber (1991) states that the overall well being of the child may have to do more with family dynamics than family structure.

#### Differences in Coping Styles between African American and Caucasian Adolescents

There is very little research that specifically addresses the coping styles of African American adolescents and the comparisons between African American and Caucasian adolescents. Strategies used by adolescents to cope as they face the challenges of developmental and environmental shifts have been clearly identified among Caucasian populations (Steward et al., 1998). However, one study by Daly, Jennings, Beckett, and Leashore (as cited in Steward et al., 1998) found that African American adolescents use a wider range of coping strategies and more optimistically evaluate stressful events than Caucasian adolescents.

Steward et al. (1998) state that outcomes for youth living in predominantly black urban settings are generally bleak. In addition to the normal developmental challenges that adolescents face, these adolescents living in poor settings face other problems such as poverty, academic failure, early death due to poor health care and violence, drug abuse and addiction, high unemployment rates, teenage pregnancy, gangs, and high crime rates (Steward et al. 1998).

Research by Stevens (1997) attempts to determine how some African American adolescents are able to cope with everyday pressures in addition to all the added demands they may face in their everyday lives. Stevens (1997) states that ego coping mechanisms are adaptable, intentional, discriminative, oriented toward present reality and future planning, tempered, and harmonious. The capacity for intersubjective relatedness is a critical element of prosocial behavior and effective coping measures. Some protective factors that play an important part in an adolescent's perceived relatedness include church membership, school attendance, and employment (Stevens, 1997). Participation in such groups offers positive role models for adolescents, as well as the chance to develop skills and relationships.

Blocker and Copeland (as cited in Steward et al., 1998) found that resilient youth tend to have an internal locus of control, take an active orientation to life, seek out others, be less likely to go along with the crowd, prefer to follow their own mind, be involved in a greater number of

positive activities, spend more hours on homework, and spend fewer hours alone. Losel and Bleisner (as cited in Steward et al., 1998) identified intelligence, temperament, self-related cognitions, coping styles, social support, and social climate as potential protective factors against environmental stress. Some possible resilience factors among children of welfare recipients could include intellectual capacity, absence of physical abuse, stable care-taking, and parental expectations (Herrenkohl, Herrenkohl, and Egolf, 1994).

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between adolescent coping strategies and the marital status of the parents. This study will also examine the differences in coping strategies between African American and Caucasian adolescents differences because there is currently a lack of research analyzing these differences.

## CHAPTER III

### Method

#### Subjects

The subjects involved in this study were students from a high school in a large mid-western urban center. The school's population is racially divided almost evenly among African American and Caucasian students.

The sample for this study was drawn through convenience sampling. The sample was one that was accessible to the researcher through the personal contact of the researcher.

Of the 110 total subjects, 42% of the subjects came from nondivorced families (birth parents still married), 40% were from divorced families (birth parents divorced from each other), 17% were from families where the birth parents were never married, and 1% of the subjects were from families that were separated.

The 18 students whose parents were never married and the four students whose parents were separated at the time of the study were left out of the study. These students were excluded because being separated and never married is considered neither "still married" nor "divorced". It was the researcher's intention to exclude these students to keep the distinction between "divorced" and "still married" very clear.

The demographic data pertaining to this sample of 88 students revealed 34.1% of the participants were African American, 64.8% were Caucasian, and 1.1% were of another racial background.

The participants ranged in age from 15 through 19 years of age, with a mean age of 17.77 (SD= .81). Of the subjects, 11.4% were sophomores and 88.6% were seniors.

The gender of the subjects was split evenly, with 50% female and 50% male. Of the subjects, 51.1% were from nondivorced families and 48.9% were from divorced families.

Table 1 shows the total number of divorced and nondivorced families according to race.

Table 1. Marital status and Race

	<b>Nondivorced</b>	<b>Divorced</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>African American</b>	8	22	30
<b>Caucasian</b>	37	20	57
<b>Other</b>	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	45	43	88

### Instrument

The instrument used for this study was the Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (A-COPE), which measures

adolescent coping styles and behaviors. According to Newcomb (as cited in Keyser & Sweetland, 1987), the scale was designed by Joan Patterson and Hamilton McCubbin to assess how adolescents manage the developmental tasks confronted during the transition from childhood to young adulthood.

The A-COPE is a 54 item scale which has been broken down into twelve scales that assess different coping patterns among adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 years of age. The twelve scales are as follows: (1) ventilating feelings; (2) seeking diversions; (3) developing self-reliance; (4) developing social support; (5) solving family problems; (6) avoiding problems; (7) seeking spiritual support; (8) investing in close friends; (9) seeking professional support; (10) engaging in demanding activity; (11) being humorous; and (12) relaxing.

Each of the 54 items has five response categories: never, hardly ever, sometimes, often, or most of the time. The respondent circles the response that most accurately describes how often he/she engages in each of the behaviors presented when faced with difficulties or when feeling tense. Each response is assigned a score based on a five-point scale. A response of "never" is scored as one point, while a response of "hardly ever" is scored as two points. "Sometimes" is scored as three points and "often" receives four points. Finally, "most of the time" is scored as five points. Nine of the 54 items are reverse-scored.

Norms provided for the A-COPE are very limited. According to Newcomb (as cited in Keyser & Sweetland, 1987), means and standard deviations are reported separately for the 185 females and 241 males in the sample that was used to determine the factor structure of the A-COPE. However, actual norms are not available. Newcomb states (as cited in Keyser & Sweetland, 1987) the total mean scores for adolescents who were in residential treatment for social adjustment problems were 168.7, with a standard deviation of 26.3. The mean age of the sample was 15.9 years. The adolescents for the sample came from a mid-western, suburban school district in which the families were primarily of middle to upper-middle socioeconomic status. There were no differences reported in scores based on race.

Very little information is given related to the validity and reliability of the A-COPE. According to Newcomb (as cited in Keyser & Sweetland, 1987), the only reliability data available for the A-COPE are estimates of internal consistency for each of the 12 sub-scales, which are fair to good. Fischer and Corcoran (1994) state the alpha estimate ranges from .50 to .75. Reliability data from the Young Adult-COPE, which is a slightly modified version of the A-COPE, has an overall alpha of .82 and good stability, with a test-retest correlation of .83. Data on stability was not available.

According to Newcomb (as cited in Keyser & Sweetland, 1987), the A-COPE could potentially help adolescents better identify the types of



coping behaviors and patterns they currently use. The A-COPE may also be used as a pre/post-assessment for intervention programs that are designed to facilitate the abilities of adolescents to cope with life stress and/or developmental tasks.

### Procedure

To help minimize the threats to validity, the researcher selected classes that were equivalent in academic levels. The researcher chose seven classes that were all considered "regular", rather than advanced English classes or at-risk, or lower level, classes.

The researcher sought the permission of the principal of the high school through a staff member. The researcher provided the principal with a copy of the permission slip (Appendix A), demographics form (Appendix B), and a copy of the instrument (Appendix C). After viewing the materials, permission was granted by the principal to the staff member who works at the school. The staff member then sought and received the permission of the head of the English department.

To obtain a large enough sample of adolescents from divorced and nondivorced families, seven English classes, six of which were senior classes and one sophomore class, were selected for the study. The classes were taught by three different teachers at the high school.

The researcher went into each class at the beginning of the class period. The teacher introduced the researcher. The researcher then provided a brief summary of the study to the students and answered any

questions they had. The students were told that they would receive ten bonus points for answering the survey. Any student who was not eighteen was given the option of taking home a permission slip to be signed by a parent and bringing the paper back to school within two days. If the slip was brought back signed by the deadline, the student could take the survey that day and receive the bonus points.

Each student was given a copy of the demographic form and the A-COPE. Students were told to leave their names off both forms. The students were also told by the researcher that all information obtained during the study would remain confidential.

The students were told that there was no time limit to complete the survey. The students who finished early were instructed to return to their seats after turning in the test to read quietly or to work on homework. Students in the class not participating in the study were instructed to read quietly at their desks or to work on homework.

Once the students turned in the completed demographics form and the A-COPE to the researcher, he or she was given a candy bar by the researcher as a thank you for his/her time and participation. Students who chose not to take the survey or did not take it because of their age were also offered a candy bar so they did not feel left out. The surveys were immediately put into a manila folder so the surveys and demographics would not be seen by anyone else in the classroom.

The students who returned the permission slip by the deadline were administered the survey by the classroom teacher at the start of the class period. Teachers put the survey in a folder once the surveys were turned in to them. The surveys were then given to the researcher the next day by the acquaintance of the researcher.

Of the 110 students who were administered the A-COPE, 18 were eliminated because the parents were never married and 4 were eliminated because the parents were separated. The remaining 88 students were left in the study.

The data was analyzed using independent t-tests to compare adolescents from divorced and nondivorced families.

## CHAPTER IV

## Results

Data analysis was conducted by using t-tests for each of the twelve subscales. These analyses were done to determine if adolescents from divorced families utilized different coping patterns than adolescents from nondivorced, or intact, families. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. T-tests for Independent Samples of Divorced and Nondivorced Families

	Nondivorced (n=45)		Divorced (n=43)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Engaging in Demanding Activity	11.44	3.25	12.65	3.94	-1.570	0.120
Being Humorous	6.98	1.78	7.65	1.96	-1.689	0.095
Relaxing	13.98	2.23	14.28	2.40	-0.610	0.544
Ventilating Feelings	18.80	3.40	17.93	2.90	1.290	0.201
Seeking Diversions	21.78	4.51	24.33	5.80	-2.308	0.023*
Developing Self-Reliance and optimism	20.02	4.21	21.88	4.57	-1.990	0.050
Developing Social Support	19.33	3.69	20.35	4.75	-1.123	0.264
Solving Family Problems	17.20	4.50	18.42	7.50	-0.929	0.355
Avoiding Problems	18.60	3.57	17.84	3.82	0.968	0.336
Seeking Spiritual Support	6.89	3.28	6.65	3.16	0.346	0.730
Investing in Close Friends	6.91	2.17	7.95	2.01	-2.333	0.022*
Seeking Professional Support	2.40	0.65	3.60	1.98	-3.872	0.000*

\*  $p < 0.05$

The results indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups ( $p < 0.05$ ) in nine of the twelve subcategories. However, three categories do indicate significant findings.

Adolescents from nondivorced families had significantly lower scores ( $M = 21.78$ ,  $SD = 4.51$ ), compared to adolescents from divorced families ( $M = 24.33$ ,  $SD = 5.80$ ) in the seeking diversions subscale,  $t = -2.308$ ,  $p = 0.023$ .

The investing in close friends subscale indicated that adolescents from nondivorced families scored significantly lower ( $M= 6.91$ ,  $SD= 2.17$ ) than adolescents from divorced families ( $M= 7.95$ ,  $SD= 2.01$ ),  $t= -2.333$ ,  $p= 0.022$ .

The subscale, seeking professional support, showed that the subjects from nondivorced families scored significantly lower ( $M= 2.40$ ,  $SD= 0.65$ ) than adolescents from divorced families ( $M= 3.60$ ,  $SD= 1.98$ ),  $t= -3.872$ ,  $p= 0.000$ .

Therefore, these results support the conclusion that there is no significant relationship between adolescent coping patterns and marital status of parents in the following nine subscales: engaging in demanding activity, being humorous, relaxing, ventilating feelings, developing self-reliance and optimism, developing social support, solving family problems, avoiding problems, and seeking spiritual support. Significant differences were observed in the three following subscales: seeking diversions, investing in close friends, and seeking professional support. In all three subscales with significant differences noted, it was observed that adolescents from divorced families engaged in these activities more than adolescents from nondivorced families.

T-tests were conducted for African American adolescents ( $n=22$ ) and Caucasian adolescents ( $n=20$ ) from divorced families to determine if adolescents from divorced families, of different racial backgrounds utilize different coping patterns. Results of these t-tests are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. T-tests for African American and Caucasian Adolescents from Divorced Families

	African American (n=22)		Caucasian (n=20)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Engaging in Demanding activity	13.59	3.43	11.25	3.92	2.064	.046*
Being humorous	7.77	1.74	7.40	2.19	.614	.543
Relaxing	14.36	2.24	14.10	2.65	.349	.729
Ventilating Feelings	17.41	2.75	18.25	2.90	-.964	.341
Seeking diversions	26.55	4.66	21.65	5.99	2.971	.005*
Developing self-Reliance and optimism	22.05	4.25	21.30	4.73	.538	.593
Developing social Support	20.50	4.27	19.80	5.12	.483	.632
Solving family Problems	17.32	4.26	19.30	9.98	-.851	.400
Avoiding problems	18.55	3.79	17.00	3.88	1.305	.199
Seeking spiritual Support	7.14	2.90	5.70	2.81	1.627	.112
Investing in close Friends	7.77	2.29	8.05	1.70	-.442	.661
Seeking professional Support	3.91	2.35	3.30	1.53	.986	.330

\*  $p < 0.05$

These results indicated that there was no significant difference in ten of the twelve subscales. Two of the twelve subscales, however, do indicate significant findings at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

African American adolescents had significantly higher scores ( $M = 13.59$ ,  $SD = 3.43$ ) than Caucasian adolescents ( $M = 11.25$ ,

SD= 3.92) in the engaging in demanding activity subscale,  $t= 2.064$ ,  $p= 0.046$ .

African American adolescents scored significantly higher (M= 26.55, SD= 4.66) than Caucasian adolescents (M= 21.65, SD= 5.99) in the seeking diversions subscale,  $t= 2.971$ ,  $p= 0.005$ .



## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between adolescent coping styles and the marital status of parents.

The results of this research failed to reject the null hypothesis. As was stated in Chapter IV, there is not a significant relationship between adolescent coping patterns and parental marital status in nine of the twelve subcategories.

Three of the twelve subscales revealed significant differences between coping strategies and parental marital status at the  $p < 0.05$  level. These three subscales, seeking diversions, investing in close friends, and seeking professional support, revealed that adolescents from divorced families involve themselves in these activities more than adolescents from nondivorced families. It is possible that these adolescents from divorced families are engaging in these activities more than their peers from nondivorced families because there may not be as much support coming from the home. It is possible that these adolescents are living in single-parent families, which means that the in-home parent is working full-time to support the family and may have less time than the nondivorced families to provide support to the adolescent. Therefore, the adolescent is forced to go outside of the home to receive support from friends and professionals and seek diversions. The other nine subscales, however,

revealed no significant differences between adolescents from divorced and nondivorced families.

While the sample sizes were very similar (see Table 1), the researcher noted that the divorced and nondivorced groups varied considerably by race. The divorced sample was much more closely matched in numbers, with 22 African American subjects and 20 Caucasian subjects. However, while there were 37 Caucasian subjects in the married sample, there were only eight African American subjects in this same group. Therefore, the researcher performed independent t-tests comparing African American and Caucasian adolescents from divorced families to examine whether or not there were significant differences based on these racial differences. This was done to eliminate the possibility that the results were due to racial differences as opposed to marital status of the parents. These results revealed significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level in only two subscales, engaging in demanding activity and seeking diversions. The African American subjects engaged in both of these activities more on average than the Caucasian subjects.

It is somewhat difficult to support the results of this study with other research because most other research examines coping patterns or divorce in relation to some other factor, such as self-esteem (Garber, 1991; Palosaari & Aro, 1995; Bynum & Durm, 1996), beliefs or attitudes about marital disruption (Kurtz, 1994), previous behavioral disturbance prior to parental divorce (Jenkins & Smith, 1993), self-regulation (Lengua

& Sandler, 1996), physical symptomatology (Mechanic & Hansell, 1989), gender or age differences at the time of divorce (Howell et al., 1997; Gonzalez et al., 1995), social competence (Kliewer & Sandler, 1993), or access to noncustodial parents (Pagani-Kurtz & Derevensky, 1997), which were not examined in this study.

However, the results of the study are consistent with the research of Isaacs and Leon (as cited in Silitsky, 1996), which found that the availability of social support is related directly and indirectly to adolescents adjustment after divorce. Because the adolescents in this sample from divorced families engaged in more of seeking diversions, investing in close friends, and seeking professional support, it can be assumed that these adolescents are searching for necessary social support outside of the family.

Seiffge-Krenke (1993) found that strategies such as denial and distraction might not be as effective as some other forms of coping, yet they may lead to positive outcomes for the adolescent. This research supports that those are two forms of coping strategies that were highly utilized by the adolescents in the sample in this study. Both adolescents from divorced and nondivorced families actively utilize these two forms of coping, seeking diversions and avoiding problems, when they are faced with problems or stressful situations. As Seiffge-Krenke (1993) points out, not all coping processes can be labeled as bad or good, but rather, the specific context must be considered. So while these may not be the most

effective methods, they seem to work for adolescents when dealing with a certain problem, which may not be a major problem, but something stressful nonetheless.

#### Implications for practice

This study should help counselors become more aware of the different coping strategies adolescents use to handle problem experiences. The counselor can work with the adolescent to find out which strategy or strategies the adolescent uses to deal with specific problems and explore if this strategy is the best one for the adolescent. For example, if the adolescent frequently turns to alcohol or drug use to escape the problems, the counselor can work with the adolescent to come up with a safer, more productive option to cope with the problem.

Counselors can also work with the adolescent to explore which situations the adolescent has perceived as stressful or traumatic in the past or present and how those events have effected the adolescent. The counselor can then help the adolescent adopt coping strategies to handle these problems.

#### Limitations

Limitations of this research are sample size and demographic characteristics. The use of convenience sampling limited the results of this research to the specific population of this study. The sample used for this study may well not be representative of the general population. The sample was also not matched well as far as grade level and age were

concerned. Only 10 sophomores participated in the study as compared to 78 seniors. No freshmen or juniors were involved in the study. Having students from other grade levels or better matched groups, in terms of racial distribution, would have possibly improved the results of the study.

The research of Acock and Kiecolt (as cited in Silitsky, 1996) found that differences in adjustment between children from divorced and nondivorced families were not significant when differences in socioeconomic status were controlled for. Therefore, a limitation of this study could be the lack of control for socioeconomic status among the subjects. The school from which the sample was drawn serves students from families that are from predominately middle to lower socioeconomic statuses, which is not necessarily representative of the total population of St Louis County.

Possible sampling error may have occurred due to the lack of random sampling, which would have allowed a better generalization of the results of this study. While the sample size was adequate for this study, a larger sample would have been more ideal to allow for more generalization and may have produced different results.

Another limitation is that this study was conducted in the school setting near the end of the school year. This left students out of the sample who were absent the day the survey was given or who had dropped out of school sometime during the school year.

Another area of weakness in this study is that of possible misperceptions of the subjects in the sample. The tool used was a self-evaluation survey, which allows for the subject's interpretation of questions asked and self-report bias. This also allows for outside factors being included in the results, which were not controlled for. Some of these factors may have included multiple divorces in the family and the existence of parent-like figure in the home or in the subject's life that the subject may consider a "parent" figure.

### Recommendations

One recommendation would be to investigate the length of time that has passed since the divorce to examine whether this time plays an impact in the coping of adolescents. In addition to investigating the length of time since the divorce, it would also be interesting to examine other factors that might effect the coping of the adolescent, such as significant individuals who have a "parental" relationship with the adolescent besides a parent and the relationship the adolescent has with both parents before, during, and after the divorce.

Another recommendation would be to examine the impact coping strategies have on the psychological well-being of the adolescent. It is important to investigate whether or not these strategies have a positive or negative effect in the adolescent's life and if any of these strategies are more or less effective than any other strategy. For example, would it be

more beneficial for the adolescent to utilize one strategy over another in a certain situation to have a better personal outcome?

More research needs to be done to examine the differences between coping styles of African American and Caucasian adolescents. Very little research is currently available about African American coping styles and the differences between these two racial groups.

Finally, more research needs to be done which examines how adolescents develop coping strategies. It would be interesting to find out how much influence the adolescent's family, friends, siblings, and past experiences have on how the adolescent learns to cope with problems and experiences. One important factor to look at would be to see how well the parents of these adolescents cope and handle problem experiences.

It would also be interesting to examine what distinguishes adolescents who learn to cope and adjust without significant negative results, and those adolescents who struggle and have difficulty coping with problems.

It would also be recommended to conduct more research using multiple methods of data collection so these methods can be used to corroborate one another. Data could be collected from the adolescent, as well as possibly from the teacher and parents of the adolescent. The use of multiple methods for data collection would help eliminate self-report bias and would likely produce more reliable data.

APPENDIX A  
Permission Form

Sheri Morrison, a graduate student at Lindenwood University, has my permission to administer the Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (A-COPE) to my child for the purpose of conducting a research study. I understand that the A-COPE is an instrument that looks at the different ways adolescents use coping strategies to handle experiences in their everyday lives. I understand that the results of this study will be used for research purposes only. The name of my child will not be indicated anywhere in this study and the privacy of my child will be protected completely. Results of this study will analyze and present group data only. No individual data or results will be included in this study. I also understand that the results of this study will be available in the Lindenwood University Library in the form of a bound thesis.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Legal Guardian Signature Date  
(Required if child is under 18 years of age)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature Date  
(If over 18 years of age)



## APPENDIX B

## Demographic Information

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

For the following questions, please check the most appropriate response

2. Grade Level:     Freshman     Sophomore  
                           Junior             Senior

3. Sex:  Male     Female

4. Cultural Background:

African American  
 Asian American  
 Caucasian  
 Hispanic American  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Marital Status of Parents:

Still married  
 Divorced  
 Separated  
 Never married

6. If your parents are divorced, how long have they been divorced?

Less than one year  
 Between one and five years  
 Between five and ten years  
 More than ten years  
 Don't know

## APPENDIX C

## ADOLESCENT-COPING ORIENTATION FOR PROBLEM EXPERIENCES (A-COPE)

Developed by Joan M. Patterson and Hamilton I. McCubbin

**Purpose**

A-COPE is designed to record the behaviors adolescents find helpful to them in managing problems or difficult situations which happen to them or members of their families.

*Coping is defined as individual or group behavior used to manage the hardships and relieve the discomfort associated with life changes or difficult life events.*

**Directions**

- Read each of the statements below which describes a behavior for coping with problems.
- Decide how often you do each of the described behaviors when you face difficulties or feel tense. Even though you may do some of these things just for fun, please indicate only how often you do each behavior as a way to cope with problems.
- Circle one of the following responses for each statement:

1-NEVER 2-HARDLY EVER 3-SOMETIMES 4-OFTEN 5-MOST OF THE TIME

Please be sure and circle a response for each statement.

<b>When you face difficulties or feel tense, how often do you:</b>	Never	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Often	Most of the Time
1. Go along with parents' requests and rules	1	2	3	4	5
2. Read	1	2	3	4	5
3. Try to be funny and light of it all	1	2	3	4	5
4. Apologize to people	1	2	3	4	5
5. Listen to music-stereo, radio, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Talk to a teacher or counselor at school about what bothers you	1	2	3	4	5
7. Eat food	1	2	3	4	5
8. Try to stay away from home as much as possible	1	2	3	4	5
9. Use drugs prescribed by a doctor	1	2	3	4	5
10. Get more involved in activities at school	1	2	3	4	5
11. Go shopping; buy things you like	1	2	3	4	5
12. Try to reason with parents and talk things out; compromise	1	2	3	4	5

	Never	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Often	Most of the Time
<b>When you face difficulties or feel tense, how often do you:</b>					
13. Try to improve yourself (get body in shape; get better grades, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
14. Cry	1	2	3	4	5
15. Try to think of the good things in your life	1	2	3	4	5
16. Be with a boyfriend or girlfriend	1	2	3	4	5
17. Ride around in the car	1	2	3	4	5
18. Say nice things to others	1	2	3	4	5
19. Get angry and yell at people	1	2	3	4	5
20. Joke and keep a sense of humor	1	2	3	4	5
21. Talk to minister/priest/rabbi	1	2	3	4	5
22. Let off steam by complaining to family members	1	2	3	4	5
23. Go to church	1	2	3	4	5
24. Use drugs (not prescribed by a doctor)	1	2	3	4	5
25. Organize your life and what you have to do	1	2	3	4	5
26. Swear	1	2	3	4	5
27. Work hard on schoolwork or other school projects	1	2	3	4	5
28. Blame others for what's going wrong	1	2	3	4	5
29. Be close with someone you care about	1	2	3	4	5
30. Try to help other people solve their problems	1	2	3	4	5
31. Talk to your mother about what bothers you	1	2	3	4	5
32. Try, on your own, to figure out how to deal with your problems or tension	1	2	3	4	5
33. Work on a hobby you have (sewing, model building, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
34. Get professional counseling (not from a school teacher or school counselor)	1	2	3	4	5
35. Try to keep up friendships or make new friends	1	2	3	4	5
36. Tell yourself the problem is not important	1	2	3	4	5
37. Go to a movie	1	2	3	4	5
38. Daydream about how you would like things to be	1	2	3	4	5
39. Talk to a brother or sister about how you feel	1	2	3	4	5
40. Get a job or work harder at one	1	2	3	4	5
41. Do things with your family	1	2	3	4	5
42. Smoke	1	2	3	4	5
43. Watch t.v.	1	2	3	4	5
44. Pray	1	2	3	4	5
45. Try to see the good things in a difficult situation	1	2	3	4	5
46. Drink beer, wine, liquor	1	2	3	4	5
47. Try to make your own decisions	1	2	3	4	5
48. Sleep	1	2	3	4	5
49. Say mean things to people; be sarcastic	1	2	3	4	5

	Never	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Often	Most of the Time
<b>When you face difficulties or feel tense, how often do you:</b>					
50. Talk to your father about what bothers you	1	2	3	4	5
51. Let off steam by complaining to your friends	1	2	3	4	5
52. Talk to a friend about how you feel	1	2	3	4	5
53. Play video games (Space Invaders, Pac-Man), pool, pinball, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
54. Do a strenuous physical activity (jogging, biking, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5

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