Following is the Press Release entitled
"**ADOLECENTS NEED SUPPORT AFTER PARENTS DIVORCE"**
regarding the article published in the National Council on Family Relations November 2002 issue of *Journal of Marriage and Family*. The article is entitled **"Risk and Resiliency Factors Among Adolescents Who Experience Marital Transitions"**

PRESS RELEASE

ADOLECENTS NEED SUPPORT AFTER PARENTS DIVORCE

The positive effect of neighbors, school, and peers ranks right up there with parental support as teens recover from the effects of their parent's divorce and possible remarriage, according to Dr. Kathleen Boyce Rodgers and Dr. Hilary Rose. Rodgers states, "The unique contribution of this research to our understanding of adolescent well-being after divorce is that family processes don't stand alone. Families raise their children within the context of other support systems, and in some instances these systems can buffer the adolescent from family strain."

Rodgers and Rose, researchers at Washington State University, published their findings, "Risk and Resiliency Factors Among Adolescents Who Experience Marital

Transitions," in the November issue of the *Journal of Marriage and Family (JMF)*. Dr. Alexis Walker, *JMF* editor, underscores the importance of this research when she states, "It is not uncommon to hear that adolescents suffer, even permanently, when their parents divorce and when they live in single-parent families. Rodgers and Rose challenge this view by showing us that personal resources help children deal effectively with life's stresses and strains. For example, having close friends they trust and see as supportive helps adolescents in single-parent families to feel good about themselves and to be less sad when their parents seem distracted. And having a neighbor they can count on helps adolescents in stepfamilies when their parents don't seem supportive."

Rodgers and Rose studied 2,011 adolescents in grades seven, nine, and eleven who were from intact families, blended families, and single parents families where the parent had previously been married. The researchers studied family measures such as low support from parents, low levels of monitoring from parents, as well as nonfamily factors such as peer support, school attachment, and neighbor support. The adolescents were asked to report the extent to which they used alcohol, or tobacco, or engaged in other risk-taking behaviors; behaviors the researchers described as externalizing. They also reported on feelings of depression, sadness, suicidal thoughts, and low self-esteem; which the researchers described as internalizing.

Although parental support and parental monitoring help to decrease damaging or externalizing adolescent behaviors and negative thoughts, the study also showed attachment to school lowered the risk of destructive behaviors. In fact, attachment to school was the strongest nonfamily factor predicting adolescent mental well-being.

One surprising finding was that support from parents was less effective in reducing depressed feelings for adolescents in divorced single-parent families than for adolescents in intact families. Furthermore, peer support was a buffer against low parental support of teens in divorced single-parent families. The authors speculate that teens in single-parent families may be more resilient and take on new roles or responsibilities that enable them to demonstrate independence and build self-esteem.

Researchers Rodgers and Rose hope that their study on adolescent resiliency adds to family and school counselors' ability to help adolescents who face family problems. Dr. Craig Colder, Assistant Professor of Psychology at the State University of New York at Buffalo agrees, and states, "Marital transitions can have a deleterious effect on children, and a variety of factors, including impaired parenting and limited parental support, have been proposed to account for these effects. Many children seem to navigate marital transitions without any negative effects, however, and it is important for us to understand why this is true for some children. This research suggests that adolescents who experience marital transitions should develop broad social support networks that reach beyond their parents."

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Risk and Resiliency Factors Among Adolescents Who Experience Marital Transitions

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Using a resiliency framework, we examined familial and extrafamilial factors associated with adolescent well-being in intact, blended, and divorced single-parent families. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted using a large sample of 7th-, 9th-, and 11th-grade adolescents (N = 2,011) to test the moderating effect of peer support, school attachment, and neighbor support when parental support and monitoring were low. Significant two- and three-way interactions were probed. Findings indicate that divorced and blended families have some of the same forms of resiliency as intact families. For adolescents in a divorced single-parent family, peer support moderated the effect of low parental support on internalizing symptoms. We discuss the merits of examining divorce from a resiliency perspective.

Keywords: divorce, neighbors, parents, peers, resiliency, school.

It is estimated today that almost half of all marriages will end in divorce, and that approximately 1 million children will experience divorce each year (Clarke, 1995). Research indicates that children who experience divorce fare more poorly on a number of psychological and behavioral measures than their nondivorced peers (Demo & Acock, 1996 ; Emery & Forehand, 1994 ; Hagen, Hollier, O'Connor, & Eisenberg, 1992 ; Hetherington, 1992). Relative to their nondivorced peers, adolescents who experience divorce demonstrate more disruptive and aggressive behaviors, depressed affect, more parent-child conflict, and less positive parental interaction, perform more poorly scholastically, and are less likely to be monitored (Amato, 1993 ; Amato & Keith, 1991 ; Demo & Acock, 1996 ; Lindner, Hagen, & Brown, 1992).

Researchers have attempted to explain the effects of marital transition from the theoretical perspectives of individual risk and vulnerability, family composition, socioeconomic stresses and disadvantage, parental psychological well-being, and family processes such as conflict or parenting practices (Emery & Forehand, 1994 ; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998). Alone, economic disadvantage resulting from divorce has failed to adequately explain the effect of divorce on externalizing and internalizing behaviors in adolescents (Amato, 1993 ; Amato & Keith, 1991). Furthermore, recent research indicates that family processes better explain adolescent well-being than family composition, and that financial strain may have an indirect effect through parenting behaviors and parental well-being (Demo & Acock, 1996 ; Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1998).

Little research has used a resiliency perspective to examine the combined effects of familial and extrafamilial factors associated with the well-being of children who experience divorce (Emery & Forehand, 1994). This study examines factors outside families that may contribute to the resiliency of adolescents who have experienced divorce. We consider family structure, family processes, and social supports in the adolescent's community as these relate to internalizing symptoms and externalizing behaviors. Internalizing refers to psychological states of well-being such as depressed affect, self-esteem, and suicidal ideation. Externalizing behaviors include aggression toward others, use of alcohol or other drugs, and delinquent behaviors.

Risk and Resiliency Return to TOC

Children of divorce initially fare more poorly on a number of psychosocial dimensions than their nondivorced peers (Amato & Keith, 1991 ; Emery, & Forehand, 1994). Examination of differences in functioning between divorced and nondivorced children, however, reveals relatively small effect sizes, indicating that the majority of children of divorce are resilient (Amato & Keith, 1991 ; Emery & Forehand, 1994). After 2 years, most families appear to regain a balance and begin to function well (see Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

An adolescent's ability to successfully deal with marital disruption is likely to be influenced by the presence of both risk and protective factors in different life contexts. Studies on children's adjustment to divorce have largely focused on individual risk factors and processes in the family context. At the individual level, age, gender, race, temperament, and coping strategies have been considered risk factors (Emery & Forehand, 1994). Familial risk factors identified in the divorce literature include parental conflict, reduced contact with a noncustodial parent, low parental monitoring, and low levels of parental support. These risk factors have been directly associated with negative child outcomes (see Emery & Forehand, 1994). Family processes have also been found to mediate and moderate the adjustment of adolescents to marital transitions (Amato, 1993 ; Demo & Acock, 1996 ; Emery & Forehand, 1994 ; Hetherington et al., 1998).

Low parental support has been directly associated with less social competence, higher levels of externalizing behaviors, and lower levels of overall adolescent well-being among adolescents who have experienced parental marital transitions (Anderson, Lindner, & Bennion, 1992 ; Demo & Acock, 1996 ; Hetherington, 1989 ; Lindner et al., 1992). In intact and stepfamilies that had been together for at least 2 years, lack of parental warmth or monitoring and higher levels of negative interaction were significantly associated with less social competence and higher levels of disruptive or antisocial behaviors. Similarly, in families having experienced any marital transition, poor parental monitoring was associated with higher levels of externalizing behavior (Anderson et al., 1992 ; Hagen et al., 1992).

Divorce requires an adjustment to the loss of a parental figure in the household, typically the father, as well as a decrease in available time with the custodial parent. Although research on the effect of the frequency of visitation of noncustodial parents on children's well-being is inconsistent (Amato, 1993), it is possible that after a divorce, adolescents may perceive reduced time spent with a noncustodial parent as a loss of parental support. Similarly, perceived unavailability of a custodial parent who is experiencing role strain may leave adolescents feeling a lack of parental support. Socialization theory proposes that parental support is an important mechanism for effective parenting and that a perceived lack of parental support by adolescents may increase the likelihood that adolescents would exhibit internalizing or externalizing behaviors (Amato, 1993 ; Rollins & Thomas, 1979). Thus because of the stressors associated with divorce or remarriage, a lack of parental monitoring or parental support may be especially important risk factors to adolescents who have experienced marital disruption.

Resilience has been defined as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaption despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1991 , p. 426). Resilient children and adolescents have within their character or their environment protective factors that help to buffer them from the negative forces or stresses to which they are exposed (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998 ; Rutter, 1983). For example, having a close relationship with a nonparental adult or having supportive friends may offset the influence of stressful environmental factors.

Protective factors are sometimes conceptualized as being on the opposite end of the continuum from risk factors, but have also been defined as factors that moderate the effect of one or more risk factors (Rutter, 1983). One of the shortcomings of much of the risk and resiliency literature has been the failure to statistically test the buffering effect of protective factors (Emery & Forehand, 1994 ; Gerard & Beuhler, 1999). Using a sample of 353 early adolescents in mother-only families, Gerard and Beuhler (1999) found significant associations between ineffective parenting and externalizing behaviors and economic stress and internalizing behaviors. In testing the moderating effects of protective factors, these authors found that effective parenting (as perceived by youth), low levels of parental conflict, and higher income levels did not moderate the effects of risk factors.

Little attention has been given in the divorce literature to extrafamilial social support systems as protective factors that may buffer teens from stressful family environments (Emery & Forehand, 1994). The resiliency model suggests that the presence of friends to confide in, attachment to school, or a close relationship with a nonparental adult may serve a protective function to adolescents who have experienced marital transitions (Emery & Forehand, 1994 ; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998 ; Rutter, 1983). Hetherington's (1989) research suggests that peer relationships are especially important to preadolescent and early-adolescent children. Having one supportive friend moderated the effects of stressful transitions on children in divorced or remarried families. Girls of divorced or remarried families were more likely than boys to confide in and utilize their friends for

social support; boys tended to spend more time alone or with friends than with their family.

Research on resilient children indicates that having a positive school experience is a buffer against a stressful home context (Masten et al., 1991 ; Rutter, 1983 ; Werner, 1992). Positive school experiences have been conceptualized as those in which teachers are perceived as caring and watchful of students' academic performance, and in which there is a social climate that promotes social connectivity (Rutter, 1983 ; Werner, 1992). Hetherington (1989) posited that a school environment in which teachers are supportive and rules are firm yet fair may provide consistency and predictability to children whose home life may be stressful or may seem out of control as a result of divorce. Children adjusted to divorce better and demonstrated lower levels of externalizing behaviors when they attended a school with firm and consistent rules and emotionally warm teachers. For adolescents, school is as much a social arena as a place for academic learning. As such, students' reports of school as enjoyable, having fair rules, and providing a quality education are likely to reflect relationships with teachers, counselors, and peers at school who provide opportunity for social attachments as well as academic learning. Having a sense of attachment to school could serve a protective function against family stresses.

Having a nonparental adult upon whom one can count is an additional protective factor against environmental stressors (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998 ; Rutter, 1983 ; Werner, 1992 ; Werner & Smith, 1982), yet little research on the effects of divorce has considered support of a nonparental adult (Emery & Forehand, 1994). Opportunities to have relationships with neighbors or other caring adults are likely to help protect teens from negative outcomes by providing extrafamilial support or role modeling. It is reasonable to presume that the presence of supportive neighbors may serve a protective function for adolescents whose families are experiencing marital transitions.

Hypotheses Return to TOC

The literature suggests that adolescents who have experienced a marital transition have a greater likelihood of also experiencing stressors unique from those of intact families. Adolescents in blended or divorced single-parent families may be more vulnerable to negative outcomes because of the absence of parental support or monitoring resulting from family structure changes. We have conceptualized low levels of parental support and monitoring as risk factors, whereas peer support, school attachment, and neighbor support are considered protective factors. Based on previous risk and resiliency research, we expect that the presence of supports outside a family will buffer adolescents from low levels of parental support or low levels of parental monitoring. We also expect that these nonfamilial factors will be most salient for teens who have experienced a parental marital transition. The following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1. Low parental support and low parental monitoring will be associated with higher externalizing and internalizing for adolescents in blended and divorced single-parent families when compared with teens in intact families.

Hypothesis 2. Nonfamilial factors (peer support, neighbor support, and school attachment) will moderate associations between family factors (parental support and parental monitoring) and the outcome variables (externalizing and internalizing).

Hypothesis 3. The moderating effect of nonfamilial factors will be especially important for adolescents who have experienced one or more parental marital transitions.

A recent meta-analysis of 92 studies of the affects of divorce on children indicates that male and female children of divorce do not differ significantly on psychosocial factors such as aggression, delinquency, conduct, self-esteem, depression, or happiness (Amato & Keith, 1991). These findings, and our primary interest in the interactions between familial and nonfamilial factors, prompt us to control for gender. Additionally, because parenting processes and the outcomes of interest are likely to differ by age, race, and socioeconomic status, we control for these variables as well (see Steinmetz, 1999 , for a comprehensive review).

Method Return to TOC

Sample

Trained personnel collected the data as part of a larger community-collaborative research project to assess adolescent risk and resilience. An anonymous 145-item questionnaire was administered during a regular 50-minute classroom period. The sample consisted of 2,144 adolescents in grades 7 (45%), 9 (31%), and 11 (24%) in a metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. Participating schools were selected by the school superintendent's office because they were representative of a cross-section of the city's population of adolescents in this age range. All seventh-grade students enrolled in a required English course were surveyed. Ninth- and 11th-grade students participated in the study if they were enrolled in a required history course during the semester that the data were collected. Because the participating schools randomly selected half of 9th- and 11th-grade students to enroll in history each semester, our sample consisted of twice as many 7th as 9th or 11th graders. Ninety-eight percent of students who were present on the day of surveying participated in the study.

A subsample of 2,011 adolescents who lived with two never-divorced parents, a parent and stepparent, or a divorced single parent was selected for the present study. The study sample was fairly evenly divided by gender (48% boys, 52% girls) and ranged in age from 11 to 17 years (mean age = 14 years). Sixty percent of the sample resided in an intact two-parent family; 20% in a blended family; and 20% with a divorced single parent (347 single mothers, 56 single fathers). The sample was primarily White (85%); 11% of respondents were African American, and the remaining 4% were of various other races. About one third of the parents held a high school diploma as their highest level of education (35% of mothers and fathers), between 26%–28% of parents had some college or technical education beyond high school, and 21%–22% of parents held a degree from a 4-year university. Thirteen percent of fathers and 11% of mothers held postgraduate degrees. Four percent of mothers and 5% of fathers had no higher than an elementary school or eighth-grade education. Fifty-nine percent of mothers and 73% of fathers in the sample worked full-time, 14% of mothers worked part-time, and 13% were full-time homemakers. Fewer than 2% of parents in the sample were unemployed at the time of surveying.

Measures

Family risk factors. Parental support was assessed by a three-item measure of adolescents' perception of their relationship with each parent (e.g., “My mother/father is there when I need her/him,” “My mother/father cares about me,” “My father/mother trusts me”) with responses ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*). The measure was adapted from Armsden and Greenberg's (1987) Parent-Adolescent Attachment Inventory and has been employed successfully by Small and Luster (1994) . Items were standardized and summed. Scores ranged from −3.52 to 1.51 (*SD* = 0.72), with lower scores representing a lower level of perceived parental support (a risk factor; Cronbach's alpha = .81 for mothers and fathers together).

Parental monitoring was assessed by a nine-item parental monitoring scale (Small & Luster, 1994) that measures the degree to which parents know where their teens are and what they are doing (e.g., “I talk to my parents about the plans I have with my friends,” “If I'm going to be home late I'm expected to call my parents and let them know”). Responses ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*always*) were standardized and summed. Scores ranged from −3.07 to 0.80 (*SD* = 0.74), with lower scores indicating a lower degree of parental monitoring (a risk factor; Cronbach's alpha = .90).

Nonfamilial protective factors. Peer support was assessed by three items that measured the degree to which adolescents perceived their peers as supportive of them. Items included “My friends are there when I need them,” “I feel my friends are good friends,” and “I trust my friends.” Responses ranging from 0 (*never true*) to 5 (*always true*) were standardized and summed. Scores ranged from −3.75 to 0.89 (*SD* = 0.88); higher scores represent higher levels of perceived peer support (Cronbach's alpha = .86).

School attachment was measured by three items that assessed the degree to which students perceived their school as having fair rules, enjoyed school, and believed they

were getting a high quality education. Responses ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*) were reverse scored, standardized, and summed. Scores ranged from ―2.00 to 1.50 (*SD* = 0.78), with higher scores indicating higher levels of school attachment (Cronbach's alpha = .67).

Neighbor support was assessed with one item: "If I had a problem, there are neighbors whom I could count on to help me." Responses ranged from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*) with a mean score of 1.62. To provide consistency and ease in probing interactions, neighbor support was standardized (scores ranged from ―1.58 to 1.31, *SD* = 1.0).

Externalizing. Externalizing is a composite self-report measure of eight variables that assessed the frequency of engaging in the following behaviors in the past month: use of tobacco, beer or wine, hard liquor, marijuana, binge drinking (5 drinks or more in one sitting), carrying a weapon, physical fighting, and frequency of sexual intercourse. Individual items were first standardized and then summed to create a continuous score representing the overall level of externalizing behavior. Scores ranged from ―.55 to 3.31 (*SD* = 0.71). Higher scores represent higher levels of externalizing behavior. A principal axis factor analysis revealed a single factor; internal reliability analysis indicated Cronbach's alpha = .86.

Internalizing. Internalizing is a composite self-report measure of depressed affect, suicidal ideation, and self-esteem. Depressed affect was measured with one item: "During the past 30 days, have you felt depressed or very sad?" with responses ranging from 0 (*no*) to 4 (*all the time*). Suicidal ideation was one item that assessed the frequency of students' thoughts of suicide in the past 30 days. Responses ranged from 0 (*no times*) to 3 (*five or more times*). Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item self-esteem scale was used to assess self-esteem. Responses were reversed as necessary so that all scale items were in the same direction and consistent with the total operationalization of the internalizing variable. Individual items measuring self-esteem, depression, and suicidal ideation were then standardized and summed to create a continuous score for internalizing behavior ranging from ―1.07 to 1.80 (*SD* = 0.59). Higher scores represent higher levels of internalizing behavior (i.e., lower self-esteem, more frequent depressed affect, and higher levels of suicidal ideation). A principal axis factor analysis revealed a single factor; internal reliability analysis indicated Cronbach's alpha = .83.

Control variables. We controlled for gender, age, race, mothers' level of education (as a proxy for socioeconomic status), and family type. Gender was dummy-coded (0 = *male,* 1 = *female*). Age was assessed by asking students how old they were at the time of surveying. Race was dummy-coded with Blacks and other ethnic minority groups as the comparison (Whites were coded as 1). Mothers' education was assessed by asking students to indicate the highest level of education obtained by the mother or stepmother with whom they primarily resided. Family type (intact, blended, divorced single-parent) was coded into two dummy variables with intact families serving as the comparison group.

Analysis

A hierarchical regression model was computed separately for each outcome variable (externalizing and internalizing) controlling for race, mothers' education level, family type, gender, and age. Variables were entered in three blocks with control variables entered in the first block. Family process and nonfamilial variables were entered in the second block to examine main effects with demographics held constant. Interaction terms were entered in the third block to test for the interaction of family risk factors × family type, family risk factors × nonfamilial protective factors, and nonfamilial protective factors × family type. All variables used in the equations were standardized (*z*-scored) to minimize problems of multicollinearity and to ease in the interpretation and probing of significant observed interactions. Muliplicative interaction terms were formed using these standardized variables (Aiken & West, 1991). The following two-way interaction terms were created: family type × parental support, family type × parental monitoring, family type × peer support, family type × school attachment, family type × neighbor support, parental support × peer support, parental support × school attachment, parental support × neighbor support, parental monitoring × peer support, parental monitoring × school attachment, and parental monitoring × neighbor support. Twelve three-way interaction terms (family type × each family risk × each nonfamilial protective) were similarly created and included in the regression model. For all interactions involving family type, two interaction terms were computed—one for each of the two dummy-coded family types (i.e., blended and divorced single-parent).

Using the methods described by Aiken and West (1991) , observed interactions were further probed using a series of posthoc regression equations. To test Hypothesis 1, simple slope analyses were conducted to examine differences in slope by family type and to determine if these slopes differed significantly from zero. To test Hypotheses 2, we conducted simple slope analyses for the family risk variables (parental support and monitoring) at high and low levels of peer support, school attachment, and neighbor support (one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively) to determine if nonfamilial variables were significant buffers against low parental support or low parental monitoring. Such a moderating effect would be demonstrated by a nonsignificant slope for a family risk variable at high levels of nonfamily support, and a significant negative slope for a family risk variable at low levels of nonfamily support. For Hypothesis 3 we conducted simple slope analyses for each family risk variable at high and low levels of peer support, school attachment, and neighbor support for each family type to determine if the nonfamilial factors significantly buffered adolescents in blended and divorced single-parent families from family risk factors (see Aiken & West, 1991 , for a full discussion of simple slope analyses).

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Externalizing Behavior

The regression analysis for externalizing behaviors revealed significant betas for age, gender, mother's education, and family type (see Table 1). Older adolescents and boys were more likely to show externalizing symptoms than younger adolescents and girls, respectively. Compared with adolescents in intact families, teens in divorced single-parent and remarried families were more likely to show externalizing symptoms. Adolescents who had mothers with lower education had higher externalizing scores than their peers with more highly educated mothers. Parental monitoring and having an attachment to school were negatively associated with externalizing. Significant two-way interactions were observed for blended family × parental monitoring, parental support × neighbor support, and parental monitoring × school attachment. Four significant three-way interactions were observed for externalizing: blended family × parent support × neighbor support, blended family × parental support × peer support, divorced single-parent family × parental support × peer support, and divorced single-parent family × parental support × school attachment. No three-way interactions involving parental monitoring were significant for externalizing.

Simple slope analyses of the blended family × parental monitoring interaction revealed significant negative slopes for all family types. Lower levels of parental monitoring were associated with higher levels of externalizing for blended ($\beta = -.46$, $p < .001$), divorced single-parent ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .001$), and intact families ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .001$). At all levels of parental monitoring, adolescents in blended families had higher externalizing scores than adolescents in intact families. Simple slope analyses of parental monitoring × school attachment indicated that school attachment moderated the effect of parental monitoring on externalizing behaviors such that parental monitoring was more strongly related to externalizing when school attachment was low ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .001$) than when it was high ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .001$). These interactions suggest that low parental monitoring is a risk factor for externalizing, especially for adolescents in blended families; it is slightly more of a risk factor when attachment to school is low. Slope analyses of the parental support × neighbor support interaction revealed slopes that were in opposite directions but that did not differ significantly from zero.

Simple slope analyses of significant three-way interactions were conducted to determine if high levels of nonfamilial supports moderated the effects of lower parental support on externalizing differently across the three family types. Table 2 presents the simple slope standardized beta coefficients for parental support on externalizing at high and low levels of peer support, neighbor support, and school attachment for each family type (one standard deviation above and below the mean). Although simple slopes were calculated for each family type, only significant comparisons between intact and nonintact families are discussed.

As can be seen in the table, the overall pattern of slope significance indicates that, with one exception, nonfamily factors were not particularly important as buffers against low parental support. Across family types, the slopes for parental support at high levels of peer support and school attachment were nonsignificant, but this was also true at low levels of peer support and school attachment. Thus the practical significance of peer support and school attachment as buffers for adolescents who have experienced marital

transitions is probably minimal. The significance of these interaction terms may be an artifact of the statistical power derived from the large sample size and the reversed directionality of the simple slopes across family types at high and low levels of the nonfamily factors (see Table 2).

One significant slope difference was observed for the blended family × parental support × neighbor support simple slope analysis. For adolescents in intact families, neighbor support moderated the effect of parental support on externalizing such that the relation between parental support and externalizing was significant at low levels of neighbor support but was nonsignificant at high levels of neighbor support. This was not the case for adolescents in blended families.

Internalizing

The regression analysis for internalizing revealed significant effects for gender, race, mothers' education, and family type (see Table 3). White adolescents had higher internalizing scores than Black adolescents, and girls had more internalizing symptoms than boys. Compared with intact families, adolescents in blended and divorced single-parent families had higher internalizing scores. Adolescents with less educated mothers had more internalizing symptoms than those with more highly educated mothers. As expected, parental support and parental monitoring were negatively associated with internalizing. Each of the nonfamilial variables were also negatively associated with internalizing. Perceiving peers as supportive, having high attachment to school, and having a neighbor to confide in were predictive of less depressed affect, higher self-esteem, and fewer thoughts of suicide. Significant two-way interactions were observed for blended family × peer support, divorced single-parent family × parental support, parental support × school attachment, parental monitoring × peer support, and parental monitoring × school attachment. Three significant three-way interactions were observed for internalizing: blended family × parental monitoring × peer support, blended family × parental support × neighbor support, and divorced single-parent family × parental support × peer support.

Simple slope analyses of the blended family × peer support interaction revealed a significant negative relation between peer support and internalizing for intact families only ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .00$, *ns* for blended; $\beta = -.04$, *ns* for divorced single-parent). Thus peer support was associated with better mental health (i.e., lower internalizing scores) for teens in intact families when compared with adolescents in blended families. Simple slope analyses of the divorced single-parent family × parental support interaction revealed significant negative slopes for all family types. Lower parental support was related to higher levels of internalizing for intact ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .001$), blended ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$), and divorced single-parent families ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .01$). Contrary to expectation, parental support less strongly related to internalizing for teens in divorced single-parent families than for adolescents in intact families.

Simple slope analyses of the parental support × school attachment interaction revealed that school attachment moderated the effect of parental support on internalizing

symptoms such that parental support was negatively related to internalizing at both high ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .001$) and low levels of school attachment ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .001$). Similarly, simple slope analysis of the parental monitoring × peer support interaction revealed that peer support moderated the effect of parental monitoring on internalizing symptoms such that parental monitoring was negatively related to internalizing at both high ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .001$) and low levels ($\beta = -.06$, $p < .05$) of peer support. Thus neither high school attachment nor high peer support were buffering agents against the effect of family risk factors on internalizing symptoms.

For the parental monitoring × school attachment interaction, simple slopes indicated that school attachment moderated the effect of parental monitoring on internalizing, such that parental monitoring was negatively related to internalizing symptoms at high levels of school attachment ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .001$), but was unrelated to internalizing at low levels of school attachment ($\beta = .01$, *ns*). Counter to expectation, lower parental monitoring was associated with poorer adolescent mental health when attachment to school was high, but not when attachment to school was low.

The simple slope tests of significant three-way interactions for internalizing were conducted to determine if high levels of peer and neighbor support moderated the effects of parental support and monitoring on internalizing symptoms differently across the three family types. Table 2 presents the standardized simple slope beta coefficients for parental support and parental monitoring at high and low levels of peer and neighbor support. Slope analyses of the divorced single-parent × parent support × peer support interaction indicated that for adolescents in divorced single-parent families, peer support moderated the effects of parental support on internalizing such that parental support was nonsignificant at high levels of peer support, but was significant and negative at low levels of peer support. This pattern of slope significance was not observed for adolescents in intact families (the comparison group). Thus for teens in divorced single-parent families, peer support was a buffering agent against internalizing symptoms when parental support was low. Peer support was not a buffering agent for adolescents in the other family types.

The overall pattern of the simple slope beta coefficients for the blended family × parental support × neighbor support interaction indicated that neighbor support moderated the association between parental support and internalizing symptoms such that the negative association between parental support and internalizing was less strong at high levels of neighbor support than at low levels of neighbor support for adolescents in blended families relative to their peers in intact families. Thus for adolescents in blended families, neighbor support provided some buffering against internalizing symptoms when parental support was low. For adolescents in intact families, simple slopes indicated that neighbor support did not buffer against the effect of low parental support on internalizing.

Simple slope analyses of the blended family × parental monitoring × peer support interaction revealed a slightly different pattern of the slope beta coefficients (see Table 2). The pattern of the simple slopes for blended families indicated that peer support did not buffer adolescents against the effect of low parental monitoring on internalizing

symptoms. Negative nonsignificant slopes were observed for parental monitoring in blended families at both high and low levels of peer support. For adolescents in intact families, peer support moderated the effect of parental monitoring on internalizing such that parental monitoring was related to internalizing at high levels of peer support but was unrelated to internalizing at low levels of peer support.

Discussion Return to TOC

This study attempted to expand the existing literature on family structure and the well-being of adolescents by examining the potential buffering effect of nonfamilial factors on family processes in three family types. We were particularly interested to know if nonfamily factors buffered adolescents from the effects of familial stressors on externalizing behaviors and internalizing symptoms. After controlling for demographic variables, observed main effects indicated that low levels of parental monitoring were predictive of higher externalizing, and low levels of parental support and monitoring were predictive of higher internalizing. Parental support was the strongest single explanatory factor for internalizing. Main effects of the nonfamily variables indicated that school attachment was negatively associated with externalizing and internalizing. Peer support and neighbor support were significantly related to lower internalizing scores (i.e., higher self-esteem, lower depressed affect, and fewer thoughts of suicide). The overall regression model was improved with the inclusion of multiplicative interaction terms. Adjusted R^2 indicate that the buffering model of resiliency fit the externalizing outcome about as well as the internalizing outcome. Probing of the significant interactions revealed different patterns for each outcome. We give attention to these patterns in the following discussion of each hypothesis.

Parenting Processes As Risk Factors

The first hypothesis posited that low levels of parental support and monitoring would be associated with higher externalizing and internalizing for adolescents in blended or divorced single-parent families when compared with intact families. With one exception, this hypothesis was generally not supported. Post hoc probing of the significant parenting processes by family-type interactions revealed that parental monitoring was a stronger predictor of externalizing for adolescents in blended families relative to adolescents in intact families. Furthermore, adolescents in blended families engaged in more externalizing behaviors than did adolescents in intact families at all levels of parental monitoring. Parental monitoring was no more predictive of externalizing for adolescents in divorced single-parent families than for their peers in intact families. Although lower levels of parental monitoring and adolescent well-being have been observed in both remarried and divorced single-parent families (Demo & Acock, 1996), unique processes within blended families may explain the observed effect of low parental monitoring on externalizing in our sample. Hetherington et al. (1998) noted, “The complex relationship between families following remarriage may require less rigid boundaries and more open, less integrated relations among the family subsystems” (p. 177). Thus in a blended

family, parental monitoring may be less of a protective factor because the mechanisms that enable effective monitoring (i.e., rules, obligations, and boundaries between parents and the adolescent) may be ambiguous.

Based on previous research and socialization theory, we argued that in blended or divorced single-parent families parental role strain resulting from a marital transition might be perceived by adolescents as a loss of parental support and might therefore be a risk factor for internalizing (see Amato, 1993 ; Rollins & Thomas, 1979). The relation between parental support and internalizing did not differ significantly for adolescents in intact and blended families. Contrary to our expectation, perceived parental support was less strongly related to internalizing (i.e., less of a risk factor) for adolescents in divorced single-parent families than for adolescents in intact families. After divorce, family roles and responsibilities may shift in response to or as a way of managing parental role strain. Reasonable amounts of responsibility assumed by adolescents after a divorce can contribute to resilience and social competence (Hetherington et al., 1998). For adolescents in divorced single-parent families, taking on new roles or responsibilities may be perceived less as a loss of parental support than as an opportunity to demonstrate independence and competence. Expectations for parental support may be higher among teens in intact families. Feelings of depression, low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation may result from unmet expectations for support or, alternatively, may contribute to adolescents' perception of parents as unsupportive.

Nonfamilial Factors As Buffers

For Hypothesis 2, we expected that the presence of nonfamilial supports would reduce the effect of low parental monitoring or low parental support on the outcome variables. Simple slope analyses revealed that school attachment did not buffer adolescents from the effect of low parental monitoring on externalizing, nor did it buffer adolescents from the effect of low parental support on internalizing. School attachment, however, served a main effect protective function for all adolescents, regardless of their family type, for both of the outcome variables. Neighbor support was also not a buffer against the effect of low parental support, but was a main effect protective factor for both externalizing and internalizing. Although these variables were not buffers as suggested by the stress-buffering resiliency model (e.g., Masten et al., 1991 ; Rutter, 1983 ; Werner, 1992), the main effects for school attachment and neighbor support suggest their protective function on the opposite end of a continuum from risk factors.

Surprising to us was the finding that having low parental monitoring and a high attachment to school was related to higher internalizing symptoms (i.e., depressed affect, low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts). This finding was in direct contrast to our hypothesis, and suggests that when parental monitoring is low, having an attachment to school may exacerbate internalizing, rather than serve as a source of support. It is possible that adolescents who have little monitoring from parents and who have higher internalizing symptoms seek out connections with teachers or peers at school to help them cope with their feelings of depression or low self-esteem.

Probing of significant interactions for internalizing indicated that peer support was a stronger predictor of mental well-being for adolescents in intact families than for teens in blended families. Peer support did not buffer all adolescents in the sample from the effect of low parental support on internalizing, but the buffering effect of peer support was revealed in post hoc analyses of the parental support × peer support × family-type interaction. We explain this further in the following section.

Nonfamilial Buffers in High-Risk Families

Hypothesis 3 posited that peer support, school attachment, and neighbor support would buffer adolescents from the effects of low parental monitoring and low parental support and would be especially important protective factors for adolescents who had experienced a parental marital transition. In general, nonfamily factors were not especially important as buffers against externalizing for adolescents who had experienced a marital transition. In contrast to our hypothesis, high levels of neighbor support buffered the effect of low parental support on externalizing for adolescents in intact families but not in blended families. This observed finding may reflect more stable ties with neighbors for adolescents in intact families than in blended families. Relative to intact families, divorced families experience more residential mobility and therefore have reduced opportunities for youth to develop supportive relationships with caring nonparental adults in their neighborhood (Sandefur & Mosley, 1997). The absence of neighbor support may be more salient for teens in intact families and may consequently place them at risk for externalizing when parental support is low.

Our hypothesis was supported for internalizing with the divorced single-parent family × parental support × peer support interaction. Probing of this three-way interaction indicated that peer support buffered the effects of low parental support on internalizing for adolescents in divorced single-parent families but not in intact families. These results in combination with the two-way divorced single-parent × parental support interaction suggest that low parental support may not be as critical a risk factor for teens in divorced single-parent families as in other family types. However, when parental support is low in divorced single-parent families, peers appear to be an important source of support that may help minimize internalizing symptoms. Relative to intact families, neighbor support provided some buffering against internalizing for adolescents in blended families who perceived parental support as low. These findings are consistent with the resiliency model and with earlier research that has demonstrated the importance of a supportive friend as a moderator of family stresses resulting from divorce or remarriage (Hetherington, 1989 ; Rutter, 1983 ; Werner, 1992).

Somewhat surprising was the finding that for adolescents in intact families, high peer support did not buffer the effect of low parental monitoring on internalizing, but low peer support did. It is possible that teens with low peer support are not engaging in activities that require monitoring, whereas those with high peer support are engaging in activities that may require more parental monitoring.

Strengths and Limitations

As with all research, there are limitations with the present study. First, we are using cross-sectional data that were not specifically collected to examine the effects of divorce. We were limited in our ability to test a more complete model, and therefore we caution readers in inferring causal relations. Furthermore, our findings reflect the perceptions of youth about their family, peers, school, and neighbors. Data from multiple sources in family and nonfamily contexts might yield a different picture of resilience. Additionally, a longitudinal research design with measures on parental conflict, stress and coping strategies employed by youth, or the residential mobility of teens in the sample is a needed next step in future research.

Another limitation of our model is in the operationalization of the neighbor support variable. Although we assume that neighbor support would include adults in the neighborhood, we cannot be sure this is the case. It is possible that teens are seeking support from neighbors who are their same age. Correlations between peer support and neighbor support, however, are low ($r = .18$, $p < .001$), suggesting that at least for most adolescents, support from a neighbor differs from support from peers.

It is also possible that adolescents in divorced or remarried families are disadvantaged in maintaining social networks outside their families because of residential mobility resulting from a parental marital transition (Sandefur & Mosley, 1997). That neighbor support and school attachment did not buffer the effects of low parental support in these families may be due to lower levels of connection with these nonfamily support systems. Point-biserial correlations revealed that adolescents in blended families were less likely than those in intact families to have neighbor support ($r_{pb} = —.13$, $p < .001$) after controlling for demographic variables. Compared with intact families, adolescents in divorced single-parent families had significantly less neighbor support ($r_{pb} = —.12$, $p < .001$) and school attachment ($r_{pb} = —.06$, $p < .05$). Future research should examine residential mobility to more fully understand its impact on adolescents' ability to develop social attachments with neighbors or others at school. Unfortunately, our data did not afford us this opportunity.

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to the existing body of literature by examining outcomes and processes associated with marital transition from the perspective of the adolescent. Divorce research using national samples has often relied on parental accounts of adolescent behaviors or moods (e.g., Demo & Acock, 1996). In the present study, self-report of depressed affect, suicidal ideation, and a reliable standard measure of self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) provide a stronger measure of adolescent mental health than has previously been reported. And finally, examination of the interactions between risk and protective factors within and outside families extends existing research that has tended to focus on individual or family processes exclusively (Emery & Forehand, 1994 ; Gerard & Beuhler, 1999).

Conclusion

That we found limited support for the buffering resiliency model is perhaps not too surprising. Few studies have examined parenting behaviors using the stress-buffering

model proposed by risk and resiliency researchers (Emery & Forehand, 1994 ; Gerard & Beuhler, 1999). Of those that have statistically tested the stress-buffering model with parenting behaviors, few have found statistical support. Our findings suggest that families that go through marital transitions have some of the same forms of resiliency as intact families. The findings also suggest that parents are of primary importance to the well-being of children, but peers, schools, and neighbors also are important for helping adolescents navigate risks and develop skills necessary to become productive and healthy adults. In the end, optimal adolescent development appears to be a product of relationships both within and outside of families.

Given that about 1 million children in the United States will experience divorce each year (Clark, 1995), the findings merit continuing exploration in the role of nonfamilial social support systems. In this study, having friends who could be relied upon and trusted was a positive factor in the lives of adolescents in divorced single-parent families. Providing increased opportunities for these adolescents to build and maintain close friendships may be one way to reduce mental health risks. Youth clubs, youth organizations, or more formalized peer helper groups in schools may be avenues for adolescents of divorce to build supportive friendship networks that can counterbalance perceptions of parents as unsupportive.

Despite the limited support for our stress-buffering hypotheses, we believe the resiliency perspective can be useful for future research on adolescents in divorced or remarried families. The resiliency model allows us to examine the processes whereby adolescents adapt successfully in spite of challenges often associated with marital transition. Residential mobility, on-going family conflict, and adolescents' coping strategies have yet to be examined from a resiliency perspective. Additionally, examination of other protective factors such as personality, intelligence, and connections to prosocial organizations such as church can also inform us about adolescents' resiliency in the face of marital disruption. Finally, the resiliency perspective represents a shift away from the standard deficit model of children's and adolescents' response to the all too common occurrences of divorce and remarriage.

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Table 1. Hierarchical Regression Coefficients for Externalizing Behaviors

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Variable	β	*SE*	β	*SE*	β	*SE*
Control variables						
Age	.12***	.01	.09***	.01	.10***	.01
Gender	−.21***	.03	−.13***	.03	−.13***	.03
Race	.04	.05	.04	.04	.03	.04
Mothers' education	−.03*	.01	−.01	.01	−.01	.01
Blended family	.27***	.04	.22***	.04	.19***	.04
Divorced single-parent family	.24***	.04	.13***	0.4	.13**	.04
Family and community factors						
Parental support			.00	.02	−.05	.04
Parental monitoring			−.31***	.02	−.26***	.03
Peer support			.02	.02	.03	.02
School attachment			−.23***	.02	−.20***	.03
Neighbor support			−.01	.01	.01	.02
Significant two-way interactions						
Blended family × parental monitoring					−.12*	.06
Parental support × neighbor support					−.10**	.04
Parental monitoring × school attachment					.11**	.04
Significant three-way interactions						
Blended × parent support × neighbor support					.14**	.06
Blended × parent support × peer support					.13*	.06
Divorced single-parent × parent support × peer support					.12*	.05
Divorced single-parent × parent support × school attachment					.12*	.06
ΔR^2	.15		.38		.39	
Model significance	F = 51.15 (6, 1746)***		F = 96.45 (11, 1741)***		F = 29.71 (39, 1713)***	
n = 1,752						

Note: Nonsignificant interactions were omitted from the table.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 2. Simple Slope Standardized Beta Coefficients for Significant Three-Way Interactions

	Parental Support			Parental Monitoring		
	Intact	Blended	Divorced Single-Parent	Intact	Blended	Divorced Single-Parent
Externalizing						
High peer support	−.01	.01	.02			
Low peer support	.05	−.05	−.08			
High neighbor support	−.08	.04	−.06			
Low neighbor support	.07*	−.06	−.03			
High school attachment	−.01	.00	.01			
Low school attachment	.01	−.06	−.05			
Internalizing						
High peer support	−.42***	−.36***	−.11	−.17***	−.06	−.03
Low peer support	−.22***	−.28***	−.15**	.03	−.10	−.02
High neighbor support	−.35***	−.20**	−.25***			
Low neighbor support	−.27***	−.35***	−.08			

Note: Significance indicates difference from zero.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Coefficients for Internalizing Symptoms

Variable	Model 1 β	Model 1 *SE*	Model 2 β	Model 2 *SE*	Model 3 β	Model 3 *SE*
Control variables						
Age	.01	.01	.00	.01	.00	.01
Gender	.21***	.03	.27***	.02	.26***	.02
Race	.12**	.04	.17***	.04	.17***	.04
Mothers' education	−.05***	.01	−.03***	.01	−.03***	.01
Blended family	.15***	.04	.07*	.03	.05	.03
Divorced single-parent family	.10**	.04	.02	.03	.02	.03
Family and community factors						
Parental support			−.21***	.02	−.25***	.03
Parental monitoring			−.04*	.02	−.07*	.03
Peer support			−.06***	.01	−.10***	.02
School attachment			−.13***	.02	−.12***	.02
Neighbor support			−.06***	.01	−.06***	.02
Significant two-way interactions						
Blended × peer support					.12**	.04
Divorced single-parent × parental support					.12*	.05
Parental support × school attachment					.07*	.04
Parental monitoring × peer support					−.05*	.02
Parental monitoring × school attachment					−.08*	.03
Significant three-way interactions						
Blended × parent monitoring × peer support					.14**	.05
Blended × parent support × neighbor support					.13**	.05
Divorced single-parent × parent support × peer support					.09*	.05
ΔR^2	.08		.27		.30	
Model significance	F = 27.48 (6, 1743)***		F = 60.74 (11, 1738)***		F = 20.31 (39, 1710)***	
n = 1,749						

Note: Nonsignificant interactions were omitted from the table.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

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